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THE HIDDEN SIN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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1866.



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THE HIDDEN SIN.

CHAPTER I.

A MEETING IN THE CITY.

From the Rev. 17 Dec 53 (M. S. 30. 1001)
IN the forenoon of the 25th of December, 1816, I was sitting in one of those high narrow boxes partitioned off the public room of the old Greek Coffee-house, which then stood in Finsbury Pavement, reading the morning paper, and feeling that I was a stranger in London, having arrived the day before by the American ship 'Franklin,' from Baltimore. The coffee-house was empty, the streets were dreary, with a dull, heavy fog and shut-up shops, everybody was at church or at home getting ready for their Christmas dinner; but while I sat there, seeing that there was no news, and wondering how I should spend the day, two men in earnest conver-

sation entered, and took possession of the box next to mine. I knew they did not see me, and had come there for private talk ; but I saw them. One was a tall, grey-haired man, with a large frame, a slight stoop, a sober, intelligent look, and features of the Scottish type, but somewhat softened, like the faces one meets with in the north of Ireland. The other was at least twenty years younger, a smaller man, thin, dark, and disagreeable looking ; one could not say why, for he had good black eyes and hair, features of the Jewish mould, and an appearance of wiry strength, but somehow there was an expression in his face of being on the look-out to do somebody mischief, and having accounts to settle with all mankind. He was listening in a friendly manner, however, to the elder—I was going to say gentleman, but that term did not exactly apply to either of the pair ; though respectably dressed, they were both unmistakably clerks, fresh from mercantile offices, and in their holiday trim.

“It is just sixteen years ago,” said the senior, when coffee had been ordered and the waiter dismissed ; “it happened the very year that Ireland lost her parliament, the last of the century, and much about this season. I re-

member it well, I was in La Touche's employment, the only clerk he ever kept, so I ought to know a good deal about the family."

"No doubt you do," said his companion. "Did they live in Ireland?"

"In Armagh, my native place," said the elder man—he spoke with a semi-Scottish accent wonderfully suited to his look; "a town in the north, not large but very ancient, and of greater note in old times than it is now. They say Saint Patrick built his first Christian church there on the sight of the present cathedral. They show the hermitage in which he lived and died, a low hut in the churchyard, overgrown with ivy, and the old people have fine tales about a college which stood hard by, and students flocking to it from France and Spain, when learning was everywhere scarce but in Ireland. I suppose they were partly true, like most fine stories. There was nothing of the kind in my time, nor for hundreds of years before it; but Armagh was a bishop's see, the chief town of one of the Ulster counties, foremost in the linen trade, and on the coach road between Dublin and Belfast. It had a good market for corn and flax, linen cloth, and yarn. The country round was all gentlemen's seats and comfortable farms. There

were hand-looms and spinning-wheels going in every house, there were bleach greens beside every stream, with webs spread out and white-ening in the summer sun, and there was a deal of safe steady business done in the town. Small and old as it was, some people made their fortunes there; we did not expect such great gatherings as they do England, but we had our rich men, and La Touche was counted one of them. I have heard my father say that his father came from Dublin and set up the first bank that ever was known in Armagh, the year the new style came in."

"Was the family French?" said his listener. What a hard metallic tone his voice had; how low, and yet how clear it was!

"I suppose it must have been, from the name, though it is a known one in Dublin. I am not sure that the race has not relations there to this day, merchants and bankers like themselves, but on a far higher scale, and never familiar with them, no doubt the relationship was distant. However that might be, the Dublin house and the Armagh one did business together. Mr. La Touche, my employer, was a linen merchant and a banker, as his father had been before him. The old man had but two sons,

you see, one of them got the business, the other went to France to be educated for a priest, it was the only way of making priests at that time, and the La Touches were Roman Catholics. It was thought he should have got the parish, but whether there was any difference between him and his elder brother, as some people said, about Miss O'Neil, the Star of the North, they called her, whom the banker afterwards married, or whether he took another notion, nobody could tell; but the boy went out to Lower Canada as soon as his education was finished, and got an out-of-the-world parish among the French settlers there. So my master had the business all to himself; it was a good and a prosperous one when I came into his service five-and-thirty years ago.

“A weaver with a loom of his own was well to do, and a hand for fine spinning was a marriage portion not to be overlooked by small farmers and their sons. Sound profits were to be made by banking in those days; private banks were the only things to be found in country towns. La Touche was a shrewd man of business, but an honest one. I never knew a man who held his honour higher, or showed more of the gentleman in all his dealings. His

father had borne the same character before him, so had his grandfather and great grandfather among the Dublin people. They were all in the banking line, you see, and it was natural that the whole country should put confidence in him. His business was nothing to what the Dublin house did; nothing to what Mr. Forbes carries on here; but of its sort and size there was not a more respectable or flourishing concern in all Ireland than La Touche's Armagh Bank.

"All the saving farmers deposited their gatherings there, because the rate of interest was good, and everybody believed the Armagh Bank as safe as the Armagh Cathedral.

"I have said that, besides being a banker, La Touche was a linen merchant. That was the most genteel business in our country—quite above the reach of common people, on account of the skill and experience, not to speak of the capital, required to carry it on with any chance of success; but he had served an apprenticeship to it under his own father, and the bank enabled him to buy up half the webs brought to our markets sometimes, and do large transactions with the exporting men in Belfast.

"Everybody thought La Touche wealthy; and he should have been so, if his hands could

only have kept what they gathered ; but he was not the man to do that. A gentleman every inch of him, as they say in Ireland, with an open hand and open heart, ready to help, ready to spend, easy in his goings, and rather given to sport, keeping a good table and a liberal house—may be a wasteful one—never clear of company, tea and dancing, cards and supper, at least half the evenings in the week, with dozens of old followers coming at all hours to tell their distresses and get relieved.

“ When I became his clerk, Mr. La Touche had been nearly three years married to the Star of the North—they called Miss O’Neil that for her beauty. She was the handsomest woman in that side of Ulster, and came of a high family. They traced their descent from the Earls of Tyrone ; the castle and estate of Finmore had belonged to them, but the castle had been in ruins for nearly a hundred years, the estate was parted among strangers, and they had nothing but an old-fashioned thatched-roofed house, standing out among the meadows at the end of Church-lane, and a small income which was to die with the mother. She was a widow, with one son and a daughter ; but till her dying day she never allowed herself to be called anything

but madame, nor suffered anyone to sit down in her presence till they were bidden. When her son had to do something for his living, she shipped him off to America, for fear it should be known that one of the O'Neil's had come so low as to follow trade or business.

“La Touche had to show his pedigree, and prove himself descended from somebody as good as the Tyrones, before he got leave to marry her daughter. I suppose he did it to the old lady's satisfaction, for they were married. Such a wedding never was seen in Armagh. The poor people lived for a week on the leavings of the dinner; they got it all among them; and Mrs. La Touche was a fine woman, a pleasure to look at, and a pleasure to talk to; but to my knowledge she never did anything except read novels and see company. House, children, and servants, all were left to the care of Miss Livey, Miss Olivia was her state name, but she never got it—an aunt of La Touche's, who had always lived in the house, and never been married—whether on account of a very particular cast in both her eyes, or a temper of her own, the neighbours could not be certain. However, she took the whole charge, was first up in the morning, and last in bed at night,

blew them all sky-high when things went too far out of regulation; and how they would have gone on without her, nobody could tell.

“ Beyond a doubt, Miss Livey had a temper, but it did not come on often; and when matters were not quite against her mind, she was a good-humoured, kindly soul, charitable to the poor, hospitable to all comers, given to none of women’s vanities, always going about in the same old gown and cap Saturday and Sunday—maybe she thought there was no use in her dressing—and troublesome about nothing but the honour and glory of her family

“ Miss Livey had a complete account of their lineage, cut out of an old book and kept in her best pocket—I think it began with the King of France—and she always insisted that they had better blood than the O’Neils. Yet it was wonderful that she and the young madame, as we call Mrs. La Touche, never had an unfriendly word. The handsome, easy young lady gave her all her own way with the house, the children, and the servants; it was Miss Livey’s pride to see her dressed in the newest fashions from Belfast, going to parties and having company at home, while she waited on her in a manner and managed everything; and the

master, Mr. La Touche, I mean, knew his aunt's value, left all to her management, except just his business. The neighbours said he never expected the Star of the North to do anything but shine, and was as fond and proud of her to the last as he was the day they were married.

“He was a fine man himself, both in person and manner, and they kept a gay, pleasant house. It was called “The Bank;” his father had built it twice the size of any in the town; one side was the bank office, with a linen warehouse behind; the other was the dwelling-house, large and commodious for people in Armagh; and there was a garden in the rear long enough for a London street, with cherry-trees and roses, both red and white.

“I lived hard by, in Church-lane, with my father and mother, being their only son; but the Bank people were kind to me, when the business of the day was done, and the Bank and warehouse closed. You see I was clerk in them both. They asked me to stay among the best of their company, which was pleasant for a young man, and made my poor mother proud. All their friends knew me; all their children were fond of me. I was there while they were

coming and growing up, seven strong—a chain of girls with a boy at each end of it, as Miss Livey used to say. The top link was poor Raymond, the boy that disappeared so unaccountably, and ruined his father; he was learning to walk when I first came to the Bank. Then there were five girls, every one handsome like their mother. I need not go over their names; they are all on the family tombstone, except Rhoda, the youngest, next to Lucien, the last link of the chain, who is coming to your office and she lives on with Miss Livey.

“It is strange to remember all their young faces and young ways, that kept the house so lively, and sometimes bothered it, and think that they are all gone but two. Take them one and all, there was not a finer family in the country. The girls took after their mother: they had all her fair complexion and blue eyes, and, they say, her constitution, for the four eldest died of the ‘decay,’ as we say in Ireland, and it was known to run in the O’Neil family. The two boys were fairly divided between their parents. Lucien was the image of his father when I saw him last, and that was in his seventh year: he had the same brown complexion, hair and eyes nearly black, and face

inclining to be round and rosy. But Raymond was his mother's son, with her longer face, finely moulded features, blue eyes, jet-black hair, and complexion that seemed too fine for a boy. To look at him you would have thought he should have been a girl. There was a painter from Belfast who took his likeness for a picture of Kathleen, the lady who tempted St. Kekevin; but there was a firm look in Raymond's face when anything called up his courage—and he had as brave a heart and as high a spirit as any man in Ireland. Young as he was then, I never knew a better or a wiser boy; there was no mischief, no troublesomeness in him. At school he carried off all the prizes; at home he was helping in his father's business when other boys think only of tops and balls. If there were any harmless fun going on, Raymond was sure to be ringleader; if there were troubles or disputes, Raymond was smoothing matters and making peace. When Miss Livey was in the height of her tempers—when there was too much to do in the warehouse or the bank—when any of the children had got into a scrape—when any of the servants got into disgrace, as will happen in every family—when any of the poor neighbours were in hardships of troubles or any

sort, Raymond was always ready with a kind word and a helping hand. It was remarkable to hear the old women blessing him as he walked the streets, and to see how rich and poor smiled on the boy as he passed.

“His father and mother would not have parted with one of the seven for all the wealth in Europe; but Raymond was their heart’s darling; and no wonder, for he promised to be the staff of their age.

“Before he was fourteen, his father could trust him with any secret of the concern—and what concern has not the like?—send him on any private business to Belfast, let him look over the books, and answer letters in his name.

“Raymond was so clever, so sensible, so prudent, one forgot that he was but a boy. His very growth was beyond the common, for at sixteen he looked like a tall, handsome young man of two-and-twenty; and I am sure the ladies were taking notice of him, for he handed them about and paid them compliments at dances and parties like the first gentleman in the land.

“‘Haven’t I cause to be thankful, Wilson?’ the master would say to me; ‘where is the man that has got such an elder son. He will carry

on the bank, and keep up the credit of the family; and if it's the Lord's will to call me before they are all settled, Raymond will be a head to the house, and a comfort to his mother.'"

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

REASONS of my own so interested me in the narration to which I was accidentally a listener, that I did not stir nor move. The narrator, after a pause, during which he sipped his coffee, continued :—

“ Things had been going on with great prosperity in the eyes of all the neighbours, high and low, for about seventeen years, counting from my coming to the bank. The La Touches were reckoned among the county gentry, and thought wise people as well as good. They had kept clear of all the troubles in '98; the Government never suspected the Armagh banker of disloyalty; the United Men knew he was above informing, and thought he wished well to their cause. They had kept clear of party spirit, too, high as it runs in Ireland. The La Touches

had no bigotry, no uncharitableness. I have seen the Catholic dean, the Protestant rector, and the Presbyterian minister, all sitting together at their table; and whether it was a church, a chapel, or a meeting-house, that wanted subscriptions, Mr. La Touche came out just as handsomely. You may guess he and his family were well liked, and well wished, too; but, as I said before, he was both *bare* and busy.

“Nothing overreaching or selfish would the man do under any circumstances; but as the children grew up, and expenses increased upon him, every honest expedient and resource that he could think of was needful to pay his way and keep a fair show to the world. I was his only clerk, and, next to himself and Raymond, had the best knowledge of his affairs, for he liked and trusted me. Among so few hands things could be kept quiet; I don't believe that anybody in Armagh had the smallest guess that he was not laying by money for the girls, though every season brought us some push. About the beginning of the year 1800 we had an uncommon hard one, owing to a sort of run on the bank: all the farmers were drawing out their money to buy flax-seed, which was expected to be the profitable crop that year. Mr. La Touche had

made a large investment in fine linen for an American house, the first he ever dealt with; but his brother-in-law, the boy Madame O'Neil shipped out, who had come to be a merchant in Baltimore, recommended it, and they were to pay ten per cent. above the ordinary price. The linen had been packed and shipped, but no money could be got for it for three months to come—that was the condition of the contract; but the house was thought safe and steady; the profits would be considerable; and Mr. La Touche was pushed by a Quaker firm in Belfast who did not know his difficulties—he never would let man know them, if it could be helped. A brother linen-merchant of the name of Clark—by-the-bye, he was a Presbyterian, and some relation to Mr. Forbes—had made him sole executor and trustee of certain house property in Armagh; all he had to leave, and a decent provision for his widow and two dumb girls. The widow, poor woman! had never been very bright; of course her husband knew that, and left the entire management of the property in La Touche's hands.

“I knew the master had scruples about it, and if the town-rates' deposit had not been used up; he would not have done it; but there was

nobody to ask him a question on the subject, nobody to know of it at all till the money came back from America, and things were made right again ; so he took a mortgage on the widow's houses to their full value, and rather above it, from a Dublin Jew of the name of Reubens. You may have heard of him, sir, for he was famous for such transactions when your firm did business in the royal city, and was known to them, if I do not mistake. Money-lenders are apt to be known to highly respectable houses. Mr. Forbes had dealt with Reubens, to my certain knowledge. I think it was through him that La 'Touche got acquainted with the Jew. He wasn't the worst of his kind, though he took a heavy percentage, and was hard in exacting payment. They said he had no soul to leave his gatherings to but one daughter, and there was a queer story about her. However, it has nothing to do with the one I am telling. The master knew Reubens, and took the mortgage, and we got over that push. The run on our bank slackened with the passing of the seed-time ; but as the summer drew on prices began to rise, the season was dry and warm beyond the common—old people said they never remembered such a summer—and the crops were parched up

at the roots. There was nothing like a harvest except on low-lying marshy grounds, and the flax in which our farmers put such confidence had scarcely any yield. That told on the linen trade, of course; the rapid rise in the price of materials brought down many a flourishing house in the towns of Ulster, and the dearth of 1800 set in. You'll remember it, sir, though you must have been young then. Some people said it was a judgment on Ireland for letting go her parliament. That was the year of the Union, and a great fuss there was about it in the south and west; but between the failure of the flax crop and the rise of grain, the north had matters nearer home to think of: the poor had sore want among them, business was at sixes and sevens, the best doing people in the country had to draw on their savings, and with the fall of the winter another run on the Armagh bank began.

“The American house had not paid yet; the linen had a long passage—it was nearly three months out at sea; such passages were not uncommon at the time—ships and everything else go quicker now; but when it came to hand there was a glut in the Baltimore market; the house was honourable, but it could not pay, as Mr. La Touche knew. American bills were not

thought very safe then, so he did not like to take them ; but they had promised, by high and low, to settle the whole account through their Dublin banker within the month of December.

“ So much money kept out of our hands threw us back every way ; when the run began, Mr. La Touche first parted with all his plate ; he took it to Belfast himself, and sold it privately to a goldsmith he knew in High-street. Then, sir—I know it was desperation made him do it—he took a chest full belonging to Lord Lurgan, and left with him for safe keeping, and put it in pawn with a broker he could depend on. After that he borrowed from the catholic dean—good man, he lent him all he had saved up for many a year to put a painted window in the Armagh chapel after his death, and keep himself in memory among his parishioners. There was a Scotchman, too, that obliged the master—we never got over wondering at it, he was a Glasgow merchant, of the name of Macqueen, who travelled in Ulster to buy up linen for himself, and had been often enough entertained at the Bank. With these desperate expedients we got over the early part of the winter ; but the run increased as the year drew to an end and the times grew harder ; still every order was paid as it came in,

not one of the neighbours imagined that we were pressed, for the dean and the Scotchman kept the secret like true friends, and La Touche bore up at home and abroad as if nothing at all was wrong with him. He kept the worst of it even from his wife not to vex and trouble her; poor woman she would not have made so many parties, or bought so many fine clothes if she had known how things were going; but his hair, which had been as black as a raven at Easter, was more than half grey at Martinmas, and I know the sorest of his concerns was the mortgage on the widow's houses. Nothing else made him bring his spirit down to ask a loan of the La Touches of Dublin. They were his relations, as I have said, but had always given the Armagh Bank the cold shoulder, partly because they thought it interfered with their business in the north, and partly on account of an old quarrel which had happened between them and the master's father when he split away from the firm. However, La Touche applied to them in his extremity, and knowing they could trust him, besides wishing to keep up the credit of the family, I suppose, they consented, after a good deal of consideration and inquiry, to advance him two thousand on the security of his house and stock. I must allow

the master did not tell them the exact state of his affairs ; he kept back all about the plate, the mortgage, and the town rates. Yet La Touche was scarcely to blame for that. On the very day their inquiries began, he received a letter from the Baltimore house, stating that Burgess and Co. would pay over to him the full price of his linen, on the 21st of December.

“ ‘ Wilson,’ said he, ‘ that will take the widow’s houses and Lord Lurgan’s plate off my mind, the Dublin people’s two thousand will keep us up in spite of the run, and I will pay it off with the help of Providence and close attention to business.’ ”

“ We were in the middle of December by this time, the last of our money was gone, two or three civil farmers had been promised off, their drafts were to be paid next week, when we could get coin enough from the Dublin mint, where something had gone wrong with the dies, and the honest people believed us. The weather was terribly cold and wet ; Mr. La Touche had a severe cold, he took no care of himself, but the Missus would not hear of him going to Dublin, besides there were reasons for his staying at home. Lord Lurgan was daily expected at his seat, and the dean had fallen into what proved

his last sickness. Yet somebody must go for the money. By special agreement it was to be got in gold, as that would serve the Armagh Bank best. Raymond was his father's right-hand man, he knew the desperate position of the house, the mortgage, the borrowings, all were known to him, he was the eldest son and mainstay of the family, next to La Touche himself. Everybody knew Raymond's sense and steadiness; though but eighteen he looked a responsible man, and none would have wondered had they known the errand on which he was bound, when the master concluded on sending him to Dublin in his stead. Raymond had been there before, Burgess and Co. and the La Touches knew him, so did Mr. Forbes, his house was in Dublin then—by-the-bye, there was a whisper that the times were telling on it, but that could not have been true, for Forbes extended his business and moved to London in the next year, people said he was following the Irish parliament. I am not sure that the Palivez did not know something of Raymond too; yes, why should that surprise you? their house was in Dublin then, and had been ever since they came from Amsterdam. Well, they knew him I think—at least, all La Touche's friends did; it seemed a perfectly proper thing,

and the boy set out for Dublin, looking as handsome, high spirited, and kindly as ever I saw him. He started by the coach on Wednesday morning, and was to come back on Sunday night, for the sooner the money came the better, and Raymond promised his father he would not let the bag out of his hand or sight, from when it was locked up till it was delivered to him. He took a pair of pistols with him, and Raymond was not a bad shot.

“The Dublin mail was always well armed, and had never been stopped within the memory of man. The boy left us with every chance of safety. No letter could be expected within the time, and we waited in high hope for Sunday evening. It came: a clear starlight frosty night as one could wish to see in December. Mr. La Touche went down to the coach-office just at the hour to meet his son. The coach came into Armagh at eight precisely. I was in the office making up the fire, to have it bright and cheerful for receiving the welcome traveller and counting out the gold. The coach-office was not five minutes walk from the Bank. I heard the guard's bugle, and the roll of the wheels as it came in through the quiet night. But, oh! Mr. Esthers, I will never forget the father's face

when he rushed in and cried, 'Raymond is not there and the guard and driver know nothing about him!' It is all, in a manner, burned into my memory, like a fearful picture, not to be forgotten though put out of sight; but I can't go over it circumstantially, there is such a confusion and mixing up of troubles. I believe that from the first minute La Touche had got some kind of an impression like the terrible truth. He tried to say Raymond had been too late for the coach, and would come by the next mail; but within the same hour he took a post-chaise, bid me to break it to the Missus the best way I could, and started for Dublin with nothing but the clothes he stood in.

"I broke it to her. She stood it wonderfully at first, and said much as her husband had done about Raymond being too late and coming; but the maid told me her mistress never slept at all that night, and might be seen in all corners of the house wringing her hands and moaning like a ghost. The week passed away—the most dreadful seven days I ever knew. Mr. La Touche came back with the Sunday night's coach, looking twenty years older.

"Raymond had been at the two banks in Dublin; got the money paid down; was seen

going towards the coach-office in Castle-street with a leather bag in his hand, but there all trace of him was lost. No friend of the family had seen or heard of him ; he had not been at Forbes' or the Palivez, and from that hour to this no word or sign could ever be made out of the boy. Where he went, or what became of him, God only knows. Wherever it was, fully four thousand pounds—his father's last hope and only chance—went with him ; and if it were his own act and deed, may God forgive him ! Mr. Esthers, it is sixteen years ago, and I was but a clerk in the establishment ; yet I cannot look back on that time, and all that followed it, without feeling sick and sore.

“ The first sight I got of the master when he came back, showed me that the man's spirit and heart were broken, and that he had given up his son, his money, and himself for lost. He made no concealment, no endeavour to put a fair face on anything, even to his wife and family, but sent them off to a cousin he had in the county Antrim—their parting would have moved the heart of a stone—closed his bank, told me to give up everything, and went back to Dublin to surrender and go into the Marshalsea.

“ There never was such confusion and con-

sternation in any town as happened in Arnagh when La Touche's bank was known to be closed. The thing was so unlikely, so unlooked for ; there were so many losers who could ill-spare it. I shall never forget the congregation of farmers and common people outside, with shieves of guinea notes in their hands, flourishing them at the windows, and threatening to pull down or burn the house if somebody did not pay them. Having no one else to fall on, the poor souls attacked me for helping the master to deceive and cheat the country. My friends wanted me to fly, and hide in Belfast ; but I stood by my own character and his, telling in public and private how we would have paid everybody, but for the loss of the money and the boy. I had not a pleasant time of it, but there was need of some voice to speak for them. Evil tongues and evil thoughts rose up against the family whose fame had stood so fair till then. There was a report—I think it began with the La Touches of Dublin, people's relations for ever, you see—that Raymond had acted according to his father's instructions, and he and the four thousand would be forthcoming when the whole business was over. I knew that to be false, and I told the hottest of the creditors so to their faces.

“ However, it was a sad and bad bankruptcy. The tradesmen’s bills, and the servants’ wages, my own salary—but I didn’t care for that—all were left unpaid. The La Touches of Dublin seized on the house and stock as soon as they possibly could; the furniture and even the wearing apparel which the poor family left behind them—goodness knows they went bare enough—when sold out by auction, did not fetch a penny in the pound. Lord Lurgan threatened an indictment for the pawning of his plate; the town council talked of another for embezzlement—they meant the rates, you see; but the worst of all was the mortgage on the poor widow’s houses. Reubens, the money-lender, came down on them like a raven. I did my best for the sake of the master’s conscience, and my own knowledge of the fact, to get him to allow the widow and her dumb girls some provision. He was a horribly hard, dry old man, who had been dying of consumption from his youth, but it lasted him seventy years; there was nothing but skin and bone and love of money in the creature; but I got Dargan the attorney to write to him about a flaw we thought was in the mortgage, and, thank God, the poor family did get a trifle—just enough to keep them in a poor cottage

with their own spinning. There is only one of the daughters living now, and Miss Livey has taken her. Oh! but she—Miss Livey I mean—was the wild woman when it all came to her knowledge. Sometimes her temper and sometimes her grief got the better of her senses. They tell me she has never been the same since. Her belief was what I could never think true, it was so unlike the boy, that Raymond had gone off with the money to spend it in America or France. From that opinion nothing could move her; though no advertisement, no search, no offer of rewards, could ever bring forth the least intelligence of him being seen on board a ship or anywhere after he passed down Castle-street. She stood to it that he had bribed ship captains, and disguised himself, and for his sake she took a hatred to all boys.

“Little Lucien—the child was not seven then—had to be kept out of her sight, in a manner; and when his uncle O’Neil offered to take and bring him up to his business, by way of providing for one of the children, she packed him off with Denis Dulan’s wife, whom her husband had sent for to Baltimore saying, if he followed his brother’s example it should not be in Ireland. The poor Missus had always been under her

fingers, and the only dispute they ever had was about the lost boy. His poor mother would not hear it said that her Raymond had run away with his father's money. She cried over the shame and sorrow night and day, and would mind nothing else, till one night early in the New Year she roused the house, and nearly the whole neighbourhood, though it was the open country, with screams that she had seen Raymond in her room, and that he told her he had been murdered and buried in an old house in Dublin. The nurse, who had gone with them from Armagh, and all the old women about, believed that Mrs. La Touche had seen something; but the poor lady's brain was just giving up. From that hour she never spoke a sensible word, raving continually about her son, the old house, and the man that murdered him, and how he should be brought to justice. She lived in that way for seven years; being otherwise quiet and easily managed. It was a dreary house they had, in the midst of a farm which the master had bought for his cousin when he was well off, and the boy could not get married without it. The cousin had no family, and his wife was dead; but his housekeeper couldn't agree with Miss Livey. I don't know what she didn't say

of the woman : nothing tames woman's tongue, Mr. Esthers, so he gave the La Touches part of his house for old time's sake, and walled up the door between him and them. Miss Livey made the girls spin, and managed carefully what the cousin allowed them off the farm ; but they would have been poor enough if it had not been for a friend that sent them money every quarter ; first less, and then more, till it came to a decent little income. The man who told me heard it from Miss Livey herself. They are getting that money yet, and neither she nor one of the family ever could make out from whence it came. Of all the charity and kindness poor La Touche had done in his day, of all the neighbours he had helped and the strangers he had entertained, there was not one to show the slightest remembrance in the midst of his ruin and disgrace, but a man who had very little right, and that was my present employer, Mr. Forbes. He had known the master only in the way of business, and that for a short time ; yet, from the first day of their misfortunes, he was never done sending the family presents of goods and money, and, Mr. Esthers, he is sending them still, though I nor nobody ever heard him mention Raymond's business if he could help it ; but he

is a sober, serious man, very particular about his words, and it is hard to think of what anyone should say on that matter. One thing Mr. La Touche told me when I saw him last, that Forbes had solemnly asserted to him his belief in Raymond's innocence, bad as the case looked.

“ ‘And Wilson,’ said my master, when going over the circumstance—‘I couldn't see his face, for it was twilight and he sat in the corner, but judging from his voice, Forbes could not have been more moved if the boy had been his son instead of mine — Wilson, I have the same belief, God be praised for it, my Raymond did not do all that has been done of his own will and wickedness, and Providence will make his innocence clear when I am dead and gone.’

“ My poor master spoke thus to me when he lay sick in the Marshalsea. I think his sickness was just heart-break, though the doctors called it decline. At any rate he got out of the troubles of his bankruptcy and the danger of the indictments, for before the law had gone through half its course he died, in his poor prison room, and in a most Christian manner, leaving his blessing to his family—it was all he had to leave them—and visited and looked after in all his wants and wishes by Mr. Forbes. It was a thing I never

knew till the Dublin undertaker, who has now set himself up in Holborn, told me that Forbes paid the whole expense of his funeral—and such a handsome one never went out of the Marshalsea. Miss Livey says that the money he sent helped to bury the girls too as became their family. Poor things! they dropped off one after another as they grew up in that out-of-the-world farmhouse: it stands on the Antrim coast, two miles from the Giant's Causeway. They say their mother never missed them, nor her husband either; but she went at last herself, and died saying she was going to get justice for Raymond."

"It is a strange story," said his companion, as the elder man came to a pause—"a very strange story. You say the Palivezi were in Dublin at the time?"

"The Palivezi?—is that how one should call them?—I never could make out the proper way of Greek names—yes; they were in Dublin, but they had nothing to do with the business."

"Of course not; madame's father was alive then, but getting old—superannuated, in a manner—and she was taking the direction of affairs."

In what a slow, summing-up fashion that metallic voice spoke.

“Yes; but they could give no intelligence of Raymond—in fact, had not seen him at all; I heard it from her own mouth, having to wait on madame to beg her influence with the Jew Reubens. How grand and handsome she looked. They tell me she looks the very same yet. And how handsomely she acted by us! The Jew stood in fear of her, I understand—from some cause of money, no doubt—and her word went as far as the attorney’s letter. Dear me, it is one o’clock, and I promised to be with my sister in Hammersmith at half-past,” and the grey-haired man rose.

“I’ll walk part of the way with you,” said his junior. “Waiter, our bill;” and after settling their account at the coffee-house, the two walked out—and I sat there alone, pondering on that sad story of misery and sin. I had need to ponder, as the sequel will prove.

CHAPTER III.

MORTON'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

I sat as I had done for an hour and more, silent and motionless, with the unread paper in my hand. The men who had talked within a few feet of me had not been aware of my presence; the box I occupied was somewhat out of sight in a corner of that old coffee-house. Had they seen they would not have recognised me, and under other circumstances I should not have known them; but the story to which I listened was that of my own luckless family; the narrator was my father's old and faithful clerk, Wat Wilson, and I was the little Lucien La Touche, who had been sent so early to his uncle in America. Every particular related had place in my memory, stamped there with a force and vividness no after event could overlay, for they stood among life's first impressions. Our pleasant old house in

Armagh, with its homely business and frequent merry-makings. The faces of my father and mother—the one so manly, the other so beautiful. My young sisters and our plays in house and garden; my granddam, too, with her kindness and her tempers; and, above all, our clever, handsome, elder brother, Raymond, of whom we were so proud and fond. Then there was the Sunday night, when he did not come back, and we lost him for ever; my father's return from that vain, heartbreaking search; our sudden poverty in the lonely farm-house, and the night of nameless terror, when my mother's reason gave way. All stood out with terrible distinctness from the misty back-ground of my earliest recollections. The connecting chain of causes and circumstances, not to be apprehended by the child's mind, had been partly learned and partly guessed at in after years. The honest clerk's narrative made them still clearer, and also showed me the extent of my family's obligations to the Scotch banker, whom I yet knew only by name. From the depths of my soul I blessed the generous man whose sympathy had helped my father through his last desolate days, and given him the handsomest funeral that ever went out of the Marshalsea. Might the blessing of those who

visited the sick and in prison come upon him! If fortune ever permitted me I would acknowledge the deep debt to him and his.

In the meantime I had returned from America—a stranger to all that ever knew me—a man of twenty-three, strongly resembling my father in person even as my childhood promised, with his strength of bone and muscle, his ruddy brown complexion, rounded face, and dark curling hair; ay—and in spite of those gloomy shadows cast on the morning sky of my life—with his cheerful temperament and brave will to work my way and get my share of the world's good things, if it were possible. Excepting that voyage in the charge of Denis Dulan's wife, and that I had been sixteen years with my uncle, the merchant in Baltimore, my existence had no history known to friends or kindred on this side of the Atlantic. It had a story, nevertheless, which must be told, however briefly, for the better understanding of that which was to come.

Mrs. Dulan delivered me safely towards the end of my seventh year into the guardian hands of Gerald O'Neil, then one of the wealthiest merchants in the capital of Maryland, and my maternal uncle.

The first glance I got of him brought Madame

O'Neil, my grandmother, with all the awe she used to inspire, back on my childish mind. He had the same tall, upright figure, and stern, handsome face; a prince among merchants, rather by his manners than his means—trading in a noble, lordly fashion, with high honour in his own transactions, and rigid exaction of his rights from others; he was half-feared, wholly trusted, and held in more than common repute among the ready and rising men of that new world.

With the destiny that compelled him to trade, my uncle had determined to be even, by founding a house of merchant-princes. With that purpose he had toiled and reckoned ever since the old madame shipped him off; and he got into the counting-house of an old family follower, who had emigrated before the last turret of Finmore Castle fell, and grown rich in America.

My uncle had been lucky there too: rose to be a partner in the concern, bought out the old follower's interest, reigned in his stead, and largely increased the business and importance of the house. Nobody called him a screw or a skinflint, but everybody knew he could get money and take care of it. To build a mercantile firm of the first magnitude was the object which he

did not avow in so many words—my uncle was too proud for such opening of his mind—but he never concealed it.

His home was an American boarding-house ; his establishment was one black servant. He gave no entertainments ; he took no holidays ; he went to few places of amusement ; he made no intimate friends, and though always courteous—as became a descendant of Tyrone—he paid no particular attention to the ladies.

Baltimore contests the prize of beauty with all America, as Limerick does with my native Ireland, but my uncle had kept clear of its snares. No match sufficiently advantageous to help in the building of his great pyramid had been presented to his view, and he was too bent on the business to regard any other attraction. If there had ever been a soft part in the man's nature, it was trodden out in the working, reckoning routine of his life.

There was nothing when I knew him but worldly prudence, energy, and pride. He would found the great mercantile house of O'Neil, since no better could be done ; and not choosing to marry himself, for the reasons specified, he would bring up the son of his only sister, on whom such heavy misfortunes had fallen, to be his heir and

successor in the grand design, and take his name and arms if found worthy of them.

Such, I believe, were the old gentleman's intentions when he received me with haughty kindness from the hands of Mrs. Dulan; honest woman, she could not have had more care or concern about her own child, rewarded her fidelity with a five-dollar note, exclusive of all costs, and gave orders for my entertainment in the boarding-house till he could find a school for me. A school was found within the same week in an airy suburb of the town. My uncle gave precise directions what I was to be taught. His curriculum included all the branches of a sound English education, supplemented by French and Latin; and the headmaster was specially requested to let him know if I had any particular talent. I believed the excellent man at first discovered one for poetry and the belles lettres; but finding that such abilities were not likely to find appreciation with my uncle, he settled down on arithmetic and general application. It is to be hoped this last discovery was genuine; if not an apt, I was a willing scholar. My uncle had not told me so—he was not in the habit of telling—but, with seven-year-old penetration, I found out that the acquisition and retention of his good graces depended on my getting

on at school; and the necessity of pleasing him got so impressed on my mind at the beginning of our acquaintance, that it was not fairly worn out at its end. There was nobody else for me to please or look to. Father, mother, Aunt Livey, and sisters—all had been left far off beyond the sea, and I was alone, under the absolute government of that stern, busy, unfathomable man, as he seemed to my childhood, and somewhat also to my later years. My uncle was not harsh or even unkind to me. He brought me up, he paid for my schooling, and would have provided for me handsomely, but I could never feel at home with him, nor he with me, even when increasing years brought us nearer each other's status in the rational world. Our natures were contrary, and could not come together.

Morton's grammar school, the seminary at which he placed me, was one of the best and oldest institutions of its kind in Baltimore. It had been established by a Scotch family, for the education of Protestant youth, when Maryland was a Roman Catholic colony under the Calverts, and had flourished ever since, descending from father to son like a patrimony, the ranks of its inferior teachers being always recruited from Scotland and the Morton clan. They were three

in number, besides the head-master, owner and governor of the establishment, a man above seventy, who held at once the reins and the ferrule for more than forty years, he was by pre-eminence, Mr. Morton. Then there was his nephew, assistant and successor, known to us by the style and title of Mr. Andrew Morton; he superintended the second form. Next came Mr. Alexander Morton; I think he was a third cousin some years younger and very lean; he managed the third and fourth; and last of all there was Master Melrose Morton a very young man, almost a boy indeed, for he was but ten years older than myself, and had the direction of the fifth and sixth forms, being quite a new hand, and not two months imported when I took my seat at the lowest end of the latter.

I was then the youngest boy in the school, and the last that could be received. There was a rule in the establishment, laid down by its first founder, and not to be broken under high and mysterious penalties, that no more than forty scholars should be taken under any inducement. The boys were uncertain whether that limit had been fixed in commemoration of Moses' forty days' fast, or of Ali Baba's forty thieves; but they all agreed in a tradition of the grammar school having been burnt to the ground, and the

greater part of Baltimore with it, nearly a hundred years before, when the reigning Morton was induced to break that mystic rule in favour of the Governor's son. However that might be, no more than forty would the grammar school or its master receive; and I think his active old dame, Mrs. Morton (by-the-bye, she spoke broad Scotch, and always wore a checked apron) found it quite enough to provide for in bed and board—for they kept no day scholars—with the help of her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Andrew, three maids, and one man, who were all growing old in the service, and believed to be Mortons. Contrary to the use and wont of Baltimore, no negroes were employed on the premises. The burning of the school was said to have been effected by one new brought from Guinea in that slave-trading time. It was not the only particular in which the Mortons pleased to differ from current custom; they were Presbyterians, and we were marched to the meeting-house twice every Sunday, rank and file, with the teachers at the head of their respective divisions, and ranged in three high narrow pews appointed for our accommodation in that low-pitched cheerless edifice, which had been built about the time of the Salem witch burning, when the first Scotch congrega-

tion set up their camp in Maryland, and expected to bring not only the colony, but the Indian tribe, who then filled all the forests west of Chesapeake Bay, over to the Westminster Confession. I don't know what the old madame would have said about my sitting there for good seven hours every Sunday, but it did not trouble my uncle. In the hot pursuit of wealth and mercantile pre-eminence, he had got free of priestly trammels, if they ever hung much about him. On the subject of religion, I nor nobody else ever heard him speak. He was seen, but not very frequently, in all the churches, Protestant and Catholic, which the city then contained. The grammar school was a good one, and he sent me to the Mortons without making difficulties about the meeting-house. I learned to stand up at the extemporaneous prayers of the old Scotch minister—his name was Renwick, and he was said to be of the family of the last Cameronian preacher who suffered for the Covenant—to sit at the psalm singing, given out line by line, and guiltless of organ or pitch-pipe; to take rank at the foot of my class before the pulpit, and repeat my share of the Assembly's Catechism, ay, and to play pins with prudence and circumspection, while the long prayer was going forward, and

thanks to the high woodwork in front, nobody could possibly guess what I and my playfellows were about but Master Melrose.

We all knew him to be no strict disciplinarian. Promising never to do the like again, was generally sufficient to get pardon, or at least, silence, for the most heinous of our grammar-school offences. Whatever could be supposed unseen, Master Melrose did not see—that is to say, did not report it—which would have brought us into trouble, for all the rest of the Mortons were rigidly conscientious teachers. Melrose was conscientious, too, but he was kindly with it; no offender escaped without a rebuke from him in private, no lesson could be left unlearned somehow.

He had a troop of little boys to govern, and got his share of vexation and trouble in that thankless office; the larger boys found out that his salary was not large, and his relationship to the head-master very distant, on which account they were inclined to make small of him.

I don't know whether he found me easiest managed, or whether he took kindly to me from hearing I was a stranger and an orphan, but kindly he did take; and before I was a week at the grammar school, my trust and confidence

were placed in the patronage and protection of Master Melrose.

He stood by me, not overtly. Melrose had come from Scotland, and was sub to three, besides the old and young Mrs. Morton, who supervised him considerably; but in a private, unnoticeable manner, he maintained my cause and supported my spirits through hard lessons, broken rules, and attempts at fagging by the young tyrants of the grammar school.

The third usher took me by the hand, and I clung to him, having no other friend. Boy or man could not have had a better one, though no two were ever more unlike than we.

Melrose was serious and thoughtful beyond his years, beyond most people of any age. The boys had a notion that he must have seen a ghost, or met something extraordinary in Scotland to make him so sober.

Sober, Melrose was in look and manner, but by no means sour or slow, as sober people are apt to be. Every soul about the grammar school knew him to be thoroughly good-natured; he was the resource of everyone in a scrape or a pickle, as my lost brother Raymond had been far away in Armagh. He was active in person, quick in learning, and keen in observation, particularly of

character. A more honestly or sensibly conscientious soul I never knew.

Young as he was, his moral principles were as high and as clear as those of a Christian philosopher. He was deeply and devoutly religious, but after undemonstrative Presbyterian fashion; a studious lover of learning for its own sake; not endowed with any particular gift or talent, except that rare one, the power of reasoning well; and troubled with no particular weakness, except a considerable amount of honest Scottish pride, which made him careful of what people might think or say.

In face, Melrose was neither plain nor handsome; he had the high cheekbones and deep-set eyes of the north, a tolerably fair complexion, dark brown hair, a little wavy and in fair quantity. His figure was tall, rawboned, and angular; but there was a general appearance of strength and firmness about him, which I think were the distinguishing attributes of his character, too. A silent, steady youth, wise in his words, upright in his ways, making no acquaintances, because he felt the want of none, minding his daily duties in the grammar school, and going home to his mother every night, where she lived in a decent little house on the outskirts of Baltimore. Such

was Melrose Morton when I knew him first, and such he continued to be through all the years of our friendship.

It thickened every day. I had need of friends then, and Melrose stepped into the place left vacant in my early world.

By degrees I got intimate enough to be taken home with him to see his mother, a kindly grey-haired old lady. Small their house was, and their income must have been. I am not sure that they had much more than the third usher's earnings, yet nobody could call Mrs. Morton and her son anything but lady and gentleman, they had such a look of ancient good-breeding.

I noticed, too, that Mrs. Morton did not speak broad Scotch like the mistress of the grammar school; and in one of my visits I heard her speak accidentally, and not meant for my hearing, of the time they lived in Dublin.

Solitary meditations on that subject brought me to tell Melrose, in one of our quiet walks—he used to take me with him up Jones's Falls, and over the hills, when the school hours were done Saturday afternoons—the sad, strange, family secret which I had been warned to keep: it is the only rule of conduct my uncle ever gave, and the only mention of it I ever heard him make.

Well, I took the opportunity to tell Melrose all I knew about my brother Raymond, and how he had been lost, with a vague, childish hope that, as he had enlightened me on so many matters, he might be able to clear up that mystery too, and a certain trust that he would not betray my confidence.

We were in a narrow place beside the Falls, far out of sight or hearing of anybody; the mossy grass was slippery, for it was autumn time. I remember the dark red flush of the American trees. Melrose was in advance, holding me fast by the hand. I felt his fingers twitch and tremble as if they had been struck by sudden palsy; and when I looked up into his face, the expression of fearful memory that was in it made me stop short and say in my simplicity, "Did you see him? did he tell you why he went away?"

Melrose stood still for a minute or more, as if considering what he should say, and then answered, "No, Lucien; how should I see him here in Baltimore?"

"But you were in Dublin; Mrs. Morton said so last Saturday; maybe it was long ago?" said I.

"Yes, Lucien, it was very long ago. If I

could tell you anything about your brother, I would do it"—how hardly the words seemed to come!—"but I cannot; and your uncle was right in bidding you never speak of him. Take his bidding like a good boy; if you don't, it will bring great evil to yourself and your family; and when you grow up you will know the reason why."

Melrose said a good deal more in the same strain, as grown people are apt to talk to children. I promised never to speak of Raymond more, and I never ventured to break that promise; but in spite of his declaration that he could tell me nothing, in spite of my trust in the truth of all his sayings, I had a secret conviction at the time that he knew more than he pleased to tell. It puzzled me—it was a trouble to think of; it lay in my mind year after year, like a lost key at the bottom of a deep well, not to be got to the lock it could open, and forming the dim, mysterious limit of our friendship.

In all my after visits to his mother I never heard her mention Dublin again, and the only fragment of his family history Melrose ever revealed to me was, that he had been an only son, and named in honour of a little town in the

south of Scotland, where his father had lived and died a parish schoolmaster.

I cannot tell how or why, but it became clear to my childish understanding that Melrose did not like to hear me speak of my old home in Armagh, which I was much inclined to do in the early stage of our acquaintance. I had a great zeal to please the third usher, for he pleased me, so the unwelcome subject was dropped between us. There was nobody else to whom I could talk of it; the boys of the grammar school would take no interest in it, and I had been warned not to tell them of my brother Raymond, which was the only wonder. My uncle never conversed with me at all; indeed, he never saw me but for two hours on the first Monday of every quarter, when I was sent for to his boarding-house, strictly examined in his private room on all the branches of my education, commanded to apply myself steadily to every one of them, presented with two dollars for pocket-money, and dismissed with a sealed note in my hand to the head-master.

The waiting in the parlour for that to be written was an awful process to me. It must have contained my uncle's verdict on my progress, and was probably something like 'not

guilty;' for, though old Mr. Morton always looked grave and grand when he read it, I don't remember to have met with any bad consequences. There were no vacations at that school but Thanksgiving Week and the anniversary of American Independence. The boys scattered off then, but as I was not wanted home to the boarding-house, most of my holiday time was spent with Melrose and his mother.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ADVENTURE IN BALTIMORE.

So here time wore on. I rose from one form to another; I took some prizes, I got into some scrapes; I grew up to boyhood with all its attendant mischief and troublesomeness. I learned to call myself a Marylander, and come out powerfully with squibs and crackers on the 4th of July. Things not talked of melt rapidly away from the memory of the young. My old Irish home grew strange and dim in my recollection; so did the household faces. I heard of the deaths of my sisters and my mother as the successive announcements reached my uncle. He gave the intelligence in due form, as if it had been a piece of sombre news, and I heard it with almost as little feeling. The first death, indeed, was a blow; it happened only two years after I came; but for the rest, they had all

grown dead and dream-like to me, in that long and early absence. I am not sure that I did not come to be ashamed of the family. Time had made me sensible of the ruin and disgrace that fell on them through my brother's disappearance. I had outlived the sorrow, but not the terrible memories, the marvel and mystery of that inexplicable loss. I knew now why it should not be mentioned to strangers—how damaging it would be to my future position and prospects, as my uncle's mercantile assistant and probable heir. The old merchant himself, with all the blood and honour of the O'Neils to help him, could not have guarded the secret with more anxious care than I did. Nobody about me knew or dreamt of it. The emigrants who had come from our part of Ulster were poor Irish, and did not come in contact with such young American citizens as were taught and boarded in the large brick house, and played in the wide meadow-like green beside the river, which constituted the grounds and premises of Morton's Grammar School. Melrose had forgotten that I ever told him, that was clear to me, though his look at the time was queer to remember, and always recurred in my bad dreams, which were sure to go back

to that Sunday night and my father's home coming. Well, the family secret was dead and buried in that far-off country, with new associations, and a world opening before me; but these graves of the past never keep their trust well. The shadows that could come out of that silent background told on my outward life; it had something to keep from its public, something to be cautious and reserved about. That consciousness made me careful of my own goings in the slippery paths of youth. There were pitfalls on every side, into some of which my brother must have slipped, and dragged his family down to ruin. I was bound to take care of my steps, and whether this conviction or my form of character kept me out of harm's way, I know not, but I grew up a well-conducted and solitary youth. At sixteen my education was pronounced finished. My uncle sent for me to his private room, put me through a final examination, declared himself satisfied with my progress, appointing me to a desk in his own counting-house, with board and a small salary, and gave me a distant intimation that in process of time, and on proper behaviour, I might be elevated to the post of junior partner.

Of course, I made suitable acknowledgments,

and set myself to getting qualified for the promotion. Hadn't the grammar school boys felicitated me on the prospect of stepping into old O'Neil's shoes? Had not my uncle made me sensible of the great house he was to found for somebody to be the head of in his absence—(that was the old gentleman's mode of hinting at his mortality)—and should I not get over all the accountable blots on my family escutcheon with the name and arms of O'Neil, backed by an unshaken credit and an extensive capital? My own honour and profit were not the utmost limits of those early calculations. The sister whom death had spared was also the one of our household to whom my memory clung. The rest were too much my seniors, and in their own sorrows and sickness, poor girls, seemed to have forgotten the absent child. The cloud that darkened my mother's mind made her place dim in my recollection, too. But Rhoda was only one year older than myself—my first play-fellow, the hardest to part from, the longest missed, and the most mindful of me. She had sent bookmarks, messages, and latterly letters in large copy hand, not very well spelt, and manifestly written to the dictation of Miss Livey. Under it she must have grown a young

woman by this time, in the end of the solitary farm-house where I left her; but it was still the face of a fair child, with large blue eyes and light brown curls, that rose to my remembrance. Never mind the ill-spelt letters; Rhoda should have teachers and station when I became a merchant; we would live all our days together, pension off Miss Livey, and do wonders for Melrose Morton.

Such were the hopes that cheered me through the long day's work at the desk and the evening life in the boarding-house. It was a retired and select one, situated at the end of West-street, and kept by an old Quaker lady, who took in only single men of approved steadiness, and none of them under fifty, except myself, whom she admitted into her mansion, as I was given to understand, solely on account of my uncle, because he had been with her twenty-six years, and wished to have me in a safe house, otherwise under his eye. The single men were all merchants, like himself, devoted heart and soul to their warehouses and to nothing else, though some of them did go to church on Sundays. They all remembered the War of Independence, and believed a republic was the thing for trade. They all had their evening papers,

their glasses of hot rum and water, a game of backgammon, and rubber of whist ; and I never heard them talking of anything but business and the money market.

With that lively society at home, my daily work with ledgers and accounts, my immoveable uncle, and no friend but Melrose, I grew from youth to manhood as lonely as I had been at the grammar school, and for the same reasons. I did not take to gaiety or worse ; my uncle considered company unfit for a man of business, and did not approve of frequenting theatres. I had inherited, with my father's likeness, his honestly social and domestic character ; it made me feel the want of home ties and affections, but it kept me out of dissipation such as a young and limited clerk might fall into in a growing commercial town.

Still I was always solitary, and often weary of my position, even of my prospects. Rhoda's letters became less comfort, as I grew older and wiser to observe my sister's want of genteel education and breeding ; besides, they generally contained a good deal of my grand-aunt's expectations of what I ought to do for the family, with sidelong warnings against my elder brother's sin. In this state of unsatisfactory proba-

tion I passed nearly four years, and obtained some amount of the promised promotion. My uncle, to use his own words, found me capable of business, and elevated me step by step to the post of his chief clerk.

He did not employ many hands, considering the extent of his transactions, which, I have forgotten to mention, were principally with Levantine merchants. He exported tobacco to them, and imported their goods in return; it was a profitable line of business, and my uncle did the largest of it in Baltimore. Yet there were only three in the counting-house besides myself, and one of them about this time—by-the-bye, he was the sub of all—got dismissed for coming too late three times in one week, and was superseded by a young man recently arrived in America, but boasting some experience in our department in trade. “He has been nearly five years with the Palivez, and ought to know something about Levantine business. I understand his father was in the bank before him, but he is dead, and the young man has got two sisters to support, probably that made him think of emigration; when the bank was removed to London, perhaps they did not want Joyce, that is the young man’s name,” said my uncle; “I

hear their business is getting quite private and aristocratic under the management of old Palivez's daughter; she is a wonderful woman, that."

My uncle was beginning to take me into confidence, my talk and conversation at the boarding-house having given him an opinion of my discretion. We had dry chats occasionally about the ledgers, the clerks, and the warehousemen, about the mercantile connexions of the firm, and often about the said Palivez, or Palivezi, as in Greek fashion they should have been called, for they were of the old Hellenic stock, and said to be descended from Grecian princes, who held sway on the northern shores of the Euxine sea, before Tartar or Muscovite had dominion there; but we knew them only as a banking-house which had done business first in Novgorod, then in Amsterdam, next in Dublin, and, at the time of my story, was finally established in Old Broad-street, London. The bank had been cashing bills and receiving letters of credit from Venice, before Constantinople became a Turkish city. Ever since, in spite of so many removals, its credit had been growing and its operations extending under successive Palivez, who governed it from father to son, like a

line of monarchs, till the year 1801, when its wealth and responsibility at once devolved upon a daughter, the last of her family, and generally acknowledged to be equal to the best of them in business abilities, for she had virtually managed the concern in the last years of her father's life—people said the man was not incapacitated, but chose to half retire, either for the purpose of giving his daughter time to practise, or to betake himself strongly to the devotions and austerities of the Greek church. At all events, he died in 1801, and the heiress signalized her accession by removing the establishment to Old Broadstreet, and, as my uncle had remarked, narrowing its operations to large and very safe transactions with the Levant and Mediterranean towns.

Our firm had done business with the house for many a year. My uncle had a high report of its honour and liberality—no other was ever given of the Palivez in my hearing; unlike most Greek houses, they had earned and maintained a mercantile character of the first order, and their princely descent had not been shamed by the long line of bankers. The family had always been regarded as a kind of nobility, even in Dublin. They lived privately, but in considerable state, employed nobody but Greeks in their

household service ; Jews or Russians formed the staple of their retainers in the bank, but they had always kept a native clerk or two in the city, where they sojourned, and our new sub, Jeremy Joyce, had been the last of their Irish employés. He was a small, harmless, subdued creature, remarkably unlike an Irishman, with light yellow hair, and a pale face, which would have been boyishly handsome but for a pinched, sickly, weak-minded expression which never left it under any circumstances. On the whole, there was something melancholy about Joyce, as if life had not gone well with him ; a look of being cowed and kept down beyond his merits, and knowing there was no use in trying to better himself. The clerks thought him a sort of acquisition, because it was supposed he could tell them the peculiarities of the Greek house, regarding which two singular traditions had floated out as far as the United States—indeed, they were known wherever the Palivez did business—one was to the effect that none of the family ever survived beyond middle life ; fifty was said to be the utmost limit any of them had reached ; and the other set forth that all their wives were brought from, and all their daughters sent back to, the ancient seats of the race in Eastern

Russia. A man who had been in their bank for five years, and his father before him, might be supposed to have got some genuine information on those curious subjects; the probability gave me, and even my uncle, an interest in Joyce, but, to our general disappointment, the little man, though otherwise obliging and communicative, could not be got to speak of the Palivez' except in monosyllables. "Yes, sir," "no, sir," and "I am sure I don't know," were the utmost that the best aimed question could extract. It was not simplicity; though quiet and submissive to an extraordinary degree for a native of his country; Joyce was keen to observe, shrewd to remark, and very dextrous to discover. The clerks agreed he had reasons for keeping a close mouth. My uncle said those Eastern houses accustomed their servants to discretion, and Joyce went on like the rest of the counting-house.

Some two months after his settlement, I was taking a stroll through that oldest part of Baltimore which lies along the harbour, in the cool of the summer evening, when in a narrow thoroughfare, called Wharf-street, and leading to the water's edge, I saw two women walking quickly before me. The one was tall and the

other little, the former was talking in a high-pitched voice, and words that sounded like scolding, and as I passed them close to get a better view, I discovered that the little one was very pretty, but manifestly under rebuke; while the tall woman, besides being remarkably thin and bony, had her whole countenance brought to that peculiar sharpness of edge popularly known as hatchet-face, a pair of intensely black eyes, with that indescribable look of wildness in them always indicative of the unsound or unsafe mind, and a quantity of coarse ill-kept hair of the same intense blackness, but getting sprinkled with grey, completed her most singular and not prepossessing appearance. Moreover, she had on an old dingy gown with a couple of rents in it, a cloak that had once been red, but was now extremely rusty, a battered beaver hat, with a broken feather in it; yet it was my belief that any connoisseur of female attire would have known that her habiliments had once been fine and fashionable. Never did I see such a contrast to the girl who walked by her side; she did not look more than sixteen, her small but beautifully rounded figure was shown to advantage by the nankeen pelisse; a young face, fair and soft as the finest waxwork, with the living

rose bloom on her cheek and lip, her large blue eyes cast down, and shaded by a flow of curls that looked really golden under a pretty silk hat and blue ribbons, spoke to my mind as such letters of recommendation do to most men, particularly in their twenty-first year.

CHAPTER V.

SOMEBODY'S SISTER.

I COULD not help slackening my pace to look at the young lady I passed, thinking Rhoda must be something like that girl, and wondering how she got into such company. The tall woman had proceeded with her oration—it was of reproof—and the pretty girl seemed to quail under it ; but she also observed me. I saw her give me a sly glance—it was half curiosity, half encouragement. At the same moment her companion's attention was suddenly drawn to me. She stopped abruptly, turned her fierce black eyes upon me, and unwilling to provoke her animadversions, though there was nobody else in the street to hear them I hurried on. It was not a minute more before I heard the steps of the two women still behind me, and as we were passing a tavern of the lower order, out rushed a band of Danish sailors from

St. Thomas's, all drunk and in a grand quarrel. Any sober man would have been glad to get out of their way, and the women seemed frightened out of their senses. The elder uttered a loud, sharp scream, and fled down the street before them; the younger attempted to follow, but the drunken Danes striking and shouting at each other like so many demons, were upon her; and in the girl's terror—I believe it was nothing else—she ran to my side and clung to my arm. Ready, and perhaps glad of the chance of playing the knight-errant to so fair a damsel, I drew her into the nearest doorway, placed myself between her and the fighting sailors, and bid her not to be afraid.

The Danes were gone in an instant, but the poor girl seemed almost fainting. I was turning to the tavern to get a glass of wine for her, when she clung to me once more with—"Oh! sir, don't leave me. What has become of my sister?"

"Your sister?" said I, fairly taken by surprise. Did she mean that terrible woman? But here the sharp loud scream came up the street.

"Oh! she is in a fit—she is killed," cried the poor little girl, still holding fast. I ran with her to the spot from whence the scream pro-

ceeded, and there, half sitting, half lying on a door-step with a crowd rapidly gathering round from the neighbouring houses and lanes, and evidently in a convulsive fit, we found the elder woman. The Danes had rushed by her without molesting her. "But Sally always takes such fits when she is frightened. Oh! how will we get home—what shall I do?" and the young girl began to ring her hands and cry, while she still clung to my side.

"Don't be afraid," said I, drawing the small rounded arm close into mine. What man would not have done so in like circumstances?

With the help of some of the gathering crowd I got the woman lifted from the door-step, called a coach, had her placed in it, handed in the pretty girl, who begged me not to leave them, and said their lodgings were in Charles-street—second floor. Of course I did not leave two women in such distress, but went home with them to Charles-street, helped to get the elder sister upstairs and laid on her bed. The convulsions had ceased by this time, and she lay without motion or consciousness; but when I offered to run for a doctor, the younger sister, who recovered her composure wonderfully, now that they were safe at home, assured me there was no call for one. Sally

always took such fits when she was frightened or surprised, but she would soon come round. The best thing was to let her lie still; doctors did her no good. They had tried a score of the greatest men in Dublin. "But, oh, sir, we will never forget your kindness—never, never," and she wiped her large blue eyes and looked me in the face.

"I did nothing but what any man ought to have done, and been happy to do," said I. "But shouldn't you have a nurse or a doctor? Have you any friends whom I could send to you?"

"No, sir, we are strangers here; but my brother Jeremy will soon be in, and there is no use in getting doctors for Sally."

"Your brother Jeremy!" said I, "is your name Joyce?" Notwithstanding the pretty face and the fashionable pelisse, there was that in the girl's manner which made me free and easy as with one's inferior. Her speech was not that of a gentlewoman, neither was her air; and, independent of the elder sister's peculiarities, the rooms to which I accompanied them, though well enough furnished for a second-floor, seemed in a chronic state of dust and disorder. Besides she had a kind of resemblance to my uncle's new clerk; and when she said with a smile and a

blush—"Yes, sir, that is our name, and I think I know your's—are you not Mr. O'Neil, the great merchant's nephew?"

I responded—"I am, Miss Joyce." We were growing very familiar; but the girl had looked at me so archly, I pulled forward one of the dusty chairs, and sat down almost by her side.

"Oh! I thought so," she said, half hiding behind the window curtain; "Jeremy told us so much about you. Was it not wonderful we should meet and be frightened by those sailors? I hope Sally will soon wake up. It is dreadful to sit here alone; but I have to sit so many an evening."

"Shall I tell the landlady to come up?" There was something that inwardly warned me to say so at that moment, and get home as soon as I could.

"Oh! no," said Miss Joyce, "not for the world. She is so old and cross."

I couldn't go just then, and I shook the warning off my mind. It was no harm to sit with a pretty girl in such trying circumstances, so we sat and talked. She told me about her brother Jeremy, what a dear good brother he was, and their only support; how they had lived in Dublin, and been very happy while father and he

were in Palivez' bank ; but they did not save much ; only just a little fortune for her. Jeremy had put it away in some American bank till she was married ; and she did not know when that would happen—perhaps never. She didn't see anybody she liked yet. There was a captain who paid her attentions in Dublin, but they had to go away when the bank was removed ; and Sally and Jeremy would go to America, because Madame advised them. She didn't like that Madame Palivez. No doubt I did my part in the conversation, and took the opportunity to say some acceptable things as to the certainty of her getting married, the captain showing his good taste, and my own satisfaction with Sally and Jeremy for bringing her to Baltimore. But just as I was repeating that statement for the third time, and she declaring that men did nothing but fib and flatter, there came a shrill shout from the adjoining room of "Who are you giggling with there Rosanna?"

The elder sister had evidently woke up. Rosanna flew in, and shut the door so tightly that I could hear nothing but a querulous whisper ; but in a minute or two she came out looking very red, and saying, "Sally sent her compliments ; she would never forget my uncommon kindness.

If Jeremy was at home he would thank me too; she didn't know what kept him, but it was growing very late."

I took the hint to take my departure, with many assurances that I had done nothing, and a kind shake hands with Rosanna. How soft and fair her hand was, and how it seemed to rest in mine! With a second leave-taking at the top of the stairs, and a declaration that Sally would be very glad to see me when she was well enough and could sit by, I went home to my uncle's boarding-house.

How dull and frowsy the evening papers, the glasses of hot rum-and-water, and the company of old bachelor merchants looked! The disorderly second-floor, the queer, sharp-faced, sharp-tongued elder sister were not inviting objects; but the pretty face and figure of little Rosanna—the girl who had sought my protection, and clung to me in her terror, who blushed and smiled when I spoke, who talked, it seemed, so artlessly, and had so much to be sympathized with—had opened one of those windows of life which looked into the fresh green world of youthful fancy and feeling for me, and I could neither shut nor turn my eyes away from it. In the counting-house and at the ledger, among the evening papers, in

the midst of my uncle's dry chat, I was thinking of the second-floor in Charles-street.

Jeremy became an object of great interest to me now, though he could tell nothing about the Palivez. The poor fellow thanked me with most sincere-looking gratitude for my kindness to his sisters. Sally was troubled with fits, and a little peculiar; but she had been a mother to him and to Rosanna, and she would be delighted to see and thank me any time I took the trouble to call at their poor place. No wonder he looked cowed and subjugated under the bringing-up of such a monitress; and, by a few judicious questions, I also learned from him that Sally was their step-sister, the only child of his father's first marriage, and the head of the house from her youth. "For you see," said Jeremy, "our mother was an easygoing woman, and died early."

I thought it but common civility to call and give Sally an opportunity of working off her gratitude one evening in the following week. Rosanna was sewing at the window, with her hair in papers; but she saw me, and ran to open the street-door. Sally was there, in the same old gown, with a cap to match, but looking a great deal more composed than she had looked in Wharf-street; and, in spite of the shabby attire,

and dusty, littered room, there was a strong appearance of the broken-down gentlewoman about her manner, and even in the profuse acknowledgments she made me for the trouble I had taken. She was sensible of my kindness, and very sorry for giving so much annoyance with her unfortunate nerves, but they had been shaken by severe and early trials, and she rarely went out on that account.

We talked for some time in a similar strain, I depreciating my services, she exalting them to the very skies. We were both from Ireland; but Miss Joyce had somehow got higher breeding than her younger brother and sister, and in the course of our conversation she gave me to understand, by a few judicious hints, that her mother had been a lady, who lost caste by marrying the Palivez clerk.

At this point, Rosanna, who had disappeared for some minutes, returned with her curls in full array, and a better dress on. That was done for my reception, and the girl seemed half conscious that I knew it. It was a dull life, for one so young and pretty, to lead with that queer, excitable elder sister, in a second-floor in a strange town. They had no friends, no acquaintances; Jeremy was out at his clerkship all day, Sally

rarely left the house on account of her nerves, and she did not consider it proper for her sister to go out alone. They took in plain sewing just to employ their time; not that it was necessary to them—they had saved something in Dublin—but work kept people out of mischief. Sally told me all that, with a long sigh at the end of it, and Rosanna looked down sorrowfully at her sewing. In a few minutes I got up to her side; it was to see a remarkable bird in a cage at the opposite window, and there I sat talking with the two sisters about the difference between America and the old country we had left. They knew me now to be Mr. La Touche; perhaps they knew the worst part of my family history—the Palivez and all their establishment had been inquired at in the search for Raymond—and I enlightened them on my mercantile prospects, and my determination to remain and be my uncle's heir and successor in Baltimore. Sally did the most of the responding, while she sewed on; Rosanna listened, and made believe to sew, till the daylight left us—there is little twilight in those western skies, but I sat with them till Jeremy came in. Poor fellow, he seemed overwhelmed with the honour of my visit. I was entreated to come back and see them, by

the tongue of the one sister and the eyes of the other, and went home feeling that life had a pole-star for me to steer by, and its place was the second-floor in Charles-street.

What need of telling all the particulars at full length? I went back to see them evening after evening: at first it was once, then twice, then three times a week. I was pressed to stay for tea, and I stayed; the rooms grew less dusty, less littered to my eyes. Sally seemed less disturbed, Jeremy less overruled; if Rosanna's hair happened to be in paper, and her soiled dress on, those disadvantages were speedily removed at my advent. It was far pleasanter there than among the evening papers and the steaming punch. Odd as the family seemed to be, they were all Irish, and could laugh and make merry; at times, even Sally did her share in telling old Dublin anecdotes and doings which she remembered when the Duke of Leinster was Lord-Lieutenant. I have said that she was singularly genteel compared with the brother and sister: her presiding at the tea-table reminded me of my own mother, unlike as they were; and though the Joyces were not particular in matters of domestic order, they had evidently larger means than one could have expected from the brother's

position. I need not say that my chief attraction to their society was neither Jeremy nor his elder sister. I don't think it was altogether Rosanna's pretty face; but there was a dancing light in her blue eyes, which told of joy and gladness at my coming—there was the ever-changing colour and the irrepressible smile answering to all my words and looks. The girl loved me—I got convinced of that; maybe it was easily done, but no glance, no word of affection had reached me since I came a stranger to Baltimore, in my seventh year. Melrose Morton had been kind to my desolate childhood, and we were friends still; but the difference of our characters more than that of years, made it an unequal friendship, like that between the man and the boy. Besides, he had his home and his mother, his love of study, and a natural reserve which I could never break through.

Here was a young, artless, beautiful girl, as lonely as myself—rather worse situated, for she was a woman—and turning to me with all the unchilled, unmixed affection of her nature. I had a heart to give away in those days, one which nobody had claimed or valued till she came in my way. Was it strange that I took to the second-floor, that I became the family friend,

that I paid marked attentions, that I asked and obtained leave to take Rosanna out for walks, to lectures, to theatres, to concerts that came off in the evening—for I had no other time? In looking back now, it becomes visible to me that the younger sister and I were a good deal left together; that frequent hints of exalted relationship and high expectations were given; that there was no expense spared in dress and other provisions for my coming; but at the time the frank innocence of Rosanna's talk, her utter ignorance of the world, her evident trust in me and simple delight in every amusement I found for her, charmed me as I had never been charmed before. It was true that she could scarcely read, and wrote very badly, that she spoke in defiance of all grammar, and had to be told about proprieties of table by her superintending sister—but she pleased me to the heart, as the old song has it, and I had great dreams of making her a lady.

CHAPTER VI.

MELROSE MORTON'S ADVICE.

As a thunder-cloud comes over the summer sky, those dreams were crossed at times by the thought of what my uncle would say on the subject, if it came to his knowledge. To expect that he would countenance, or even tolerate, such a connexion for his intended heir and successor, was beyond the force of my imagination ; yet on that heir and successorship the castle of my hope was built. Thereby our family status was to be regained, my sister was to be rescued from the lonely farm-house, my once kindly but now terrible grand-aunt was to be set aside and provided for, and the transmutation of Rosanna into a gentlewoman was to be effected. I knew myself to be acting unwisely from the beginning ; the two schemes were inconsistent, and could never be made to harmonize. Many an endeavour I

made to break the spell ; perhaps they were not made soon enough, but the soft blue eyes drew me on, and I was lonely in life. My comings and goings to Charles-street were managed with great circumspection, however ; it was necessary to keep the affair from uncle ; and, friends though we had been for many a year, I felt a sort of necessity to keep it from Melrose Morton, too. He had always preached prudence and worldly wisdom to me, as became his seniority. He had known or guessed my prospects in the heir and successor line from my first coming to the grammar school ; and that unexplained knowledge of my family secret somehow helped to make me shy about confiding the secret of my heart to him. He had nothing of the kind himself, as far as I could learn—no friends, scarcely an acquaintance but me. Melrose led a student's life, though it was also that of a teacher : but he had his home and his mother, and I had nothing but the evening papers and the dry chats. I kept my secret from him, but before the first year of going to Charles-street was out, Melrose knew it. He had asked me to accompany him to the Baltimore Theatre one Saturday evening ; it was to see a new star from England—somebody who was to eclipse Mrs. Siddons, but did

not. I had made a prospective apology to Rosanna for not taking her. She had looked mortified, but said she would coax Jeremy; he was always kind, only Sally had to go out with them; and when we had got ourselves squeezed into the crowded gallery—Melrose would pay for no better seat at a play—there they were in the pit below, and so seated that I could not help seeing them. Rosanna looked and smiled at me; I had made up my prudent mind not to know her, but it seemed unmanly, and could not be done.

“There is a pretty girl, Melrose!” I exclaimed, taking courage from my position among the Baltimore mob; but he had surveyed the group before the words were spoken.

“She is pretty,” he said; “the sister of your uncle’s third clerk, I believe.”

“You know them, then?”

I felt my own colour rising.

“I know who they are—a family of the name of Joyce, from Dublin. What a singular-looking woman that elder sister is! Not quite clear in her mind, I should think. They say her mother was a Jewess, a daughter of old Reubens, the noted money-lender; and there was a story concerning her and one of the Palivez, the present madame’s uncle; he was the elder brother

and head of the house before her father, and is gone this many a year; but old Joyce married the Jewess a considerable time before his death. They said an annuity had been settled on her and her children, and I can't imagine what has brought the family here."

Melrose was trying to talk unconcernedly, and retail the gossip he had heard; but I knew that every word was meant for my special admonition—another oozing-out of his long-hidden knowledge of Dublin matters and my family misfortunes. The name of Reubens, the Jew and the money-lender, with whom my father had taken that fatal mortgage on the widow's houses, was graven on my memory. I knew him to be long dead. There was also an explanation of the Joyces' expenditure—perhaps of why madame advised their emigration; but the story did not cling about Rosanna—her mother was no Jewess.

"That must have been Joyce's first wife," said I, gossiping in my turn; "I understand he had two, and neither the brother nor the younger sister appear to have Jewish blood in their veins."

"Oh! yes, he married a second time; the Jewess did not live long. He got no annuity nor discreditable tale, that I am aware of, with

the second Mrs. Joyce. She was a clear-starcher's daughter, and had a terrible time of it with her step-child—that wonderful-looking woman, who superintends the family still, I suppose. The young girl is pretty," said Melrose; "but it is with the beauty of the pet squirrel or the lap-dog—there is no mind, no spirit in her face. Whatever that girl is guided and led to be, she will be, and nothing more; if well guided, so much the better for herself and all concerned with her; but, Lucien, in a world like this there are ten thousand chances of her being led the contrary way, particularly under her family circumstances; and let me tell you those waxy characters are much easier to send wrong than set right.

"You have been studying her, Melrose."

I was endeavouring to sneer, for my wrath was boiling up against his concealed censorship, and in defence of my depreciated idol.

My looks must have told Melrose more than I intended, for he made no reply, and the subject was tacitly dropped between us as the curtain rose. The play proceeded, and the star shone out.

In our subsequent meetings, no reference was made to the Joyces by either party. I am not

sure that my visits to Charles-street did not become more frequent, by way of convincing myself that Morton's insinuations were groundless, and Rosanna was the only woman I could ever love. I had not clearly understood his drift in those comments on her and her family; the tone of them had displeased me—the implied knowledge of my movements, of all connected with me and mine, and watch over the same, which Melrose had no right. The friendship cooled on my side; he took no measures to warm it up, and latterly we rather avoided each other, which our different avocations enabled us to do without any visible rupture.

Almost another year had passed away. Charles-street had become one of the institutions of my life. I had ceased to wonder and rejoice at my own dexterity in avoiding my uncle's observation. Melrose, I well knew, would never play the tale-bearer under or above-board; and knowing the business was to be a long one, and myself master of the situation, I managed it with care and caution. There had been small tiffs between Rosanna and me—little suspicions, short-lived jealousies, accusations of not caring for her, tears, protestations, vows, reconciliations, and smiles again; in short, all the usual accompaniments of a prolonged

and hidden courtship ; and in the latest of our makings-up we contrived to get formally engaged.

It was the only way to quiet her jealous fears, to assure my own conscience that I was acting right by the girl, and to settle Sally's mind, which, by hints to myself, and by open attacks on her younger sister, had proved herself rather disturbed of late on the subject of my intentions. The engagement had been made in the usual form, with exchange of vows and rings. I have kept my part of the latter till this day. There were locks of hair also given and taken ; and the whole was transacted one summer evening, when we walked together in our accustomed path leading through the fields to North Point, where they fought a battle since. The business was done, and I regarded it as a new bond to look after my prospects. My uncle was uncommonly busy that season ; he was getting into the London as well as the Levantine trade, and I was making myself more than commonly useful. We had not a dry chat for some time ; but when he sent a request to see me in his private room, I thought a particular one must be intended.

“ Sit down, Lucien,” said he, pointing to a seat right opposite to him, and a table without letter or paper on it stood between us. “ You

have reached an age which takes a young man out of guardianship, but I think it my right, as well as my duty, to warn you that you are following a dangerous course with regard to my clerk Jeremy Joyce's sister; no man should trust himself too far, and I could not overlook such a crime as seduction."

"Seduction, sir!" said I, all the honour and conscience I had rising to the defence of my own innocence.

"Yes," said my uncle, coldly, "what else would the world expect from your intimacy with a girl in her position, I may say, of her appearance? what else will it infer, whether it got proof or not? remember that a woman's reputation may be equally destroyed by suspicion as by positive evidence. Besides, Lucien, what intentions have you in keeping the girl's company?"

"No evil ones, sir, I assure you."

"Do you mean to marry her, then?"

"I do—that is, in process of time, when I have made my way in the world, and can maintain a wife."

"You mean to marry the sister of my under-clerk, a girl without fortune, family, or education;" my uncle spoke calmly, but with a cold emphasis on every word, which roused all the

man in me. We were of the same blood; I looked him steadily in the face and answered—

“Yes, sir, I mean to marry Rosanna Joyce.”

“Well, every man has a right to choose for himself in such matters,” he said, with the same business-like composure. “I think your resolution to provide for a home and a wife before you incur such responsibilities, both prudent and praiseworthy. Of course it would be pleasant to neither of us that you should remain here; when relations happen to differ in opinion on personal questions, distance is always advisable; but it is fortunately in my power to offer you a situation which may be acceptable under the circumstances. The business arrangements which I have lately made with the Palivez in London, render it necessary for me to keep an agent resident in their establishment, and as you have some experience, I shall be happy to give you the appointment, should it meet your views.”

Being unprejudiced in his favour, I never could decide whether my uncle's morality arose from principle, pride, or prudence; but strictly moral he was, in precept and practice. I knew that an offence against virtue, such as he had named, would draw down his most signal displeasure. I was also aware, though he had never said it, that

to marry a girl without family, fortune, or education, was, in his eyes, a crime of far deeper dye ; yet his quiet and coolness on the occasion fairly took me by surprise. He must have made some discovery, either from Jeremy or his own observation ; kept a silent watch on the visits which I managed so dextrously, settled the whole affair in his mind, and prepared himself for my final decision. However he did it, the old gentleman was far better prepared than I. An explosion of wrath would not have thrown me half so far out of the game ; my heir and successorship, the prospects on which I had been congratulated, and, as it were, built up from my first coming to the grammar school, all shoved quietly away from me with nothing like a demonstration, and I left no alternative but to move far away from Rossanna, or make public acknowledgment of my altered position by looking for a situation in Baltimore, which would be somewhat difficult to find, as I had no knowledge of anything but my uncle's peculiar line of business. In the astonishment and confusion of the moment, I could get out nothing, but that I would think of it.

“ Make up your mind, then, before Saturday,” said my uncle, looking as if he spoke of a shipment of goods ; “ it is requisite to have the ap-

pointment filled up at once ; my agent must be ready to sail on the first of October ; you observe this day is the second of September, and I forgot to mention that the salary is a thousand dollars, exclusive of expenses, and will be increased according to duties and desert. Good morning. I will expect your decision on Saturday.”

I rose with a silent bow and left the private room.

That day was Wednesday ; I had three days to decide, and not a month to prepare for a parting with Rosanna, a voyage across the Atlantic, a residence in a strange land, and a getting into a new course of life.

Had my uncle contrived the whole only to send me away from her and break up the connexion, if time and absence could do it, or did he really intend to cast me off and find another heir ? Foolish pride and natural obstinacy prompted me to stay and look for another situation, by way of spiting him and remaining near Rosanna ; but wiser resolutions came as I thought over the matter : let my uncle intend what he would, it was the more prudent, the more manly course to accept the offered appointment, and prove myself worthy of the choice I had made by working honestly and independently for it.

Early desolation and strangership had taught me to be my own adviser. Melrose Morton had lost caste with me since the observations he made at the theatre; yet the kindness he had shown me, and the respect I had for him, rendered a disclosure requisite. I told him all, in a walk we took for the purpose up the river's bank, where we used to walk in school time. He listened without a word: but there was a look of painful memory or concern in his face, like that of the day when he warned me not to speak of my lost brother, and at the close, he said, "Lucien, are you really determined to marry the girl? is there any promise or engagement between her and you?"

I felt my own face growing very red—being yet honest and not twenty-three—as I answered, "Yes, I am really determined; Rosanna is the only woman I can ever love; I believe she loves me, and we are engaged."

Melrose looked at me as if I had been announcing my determination to sail in a condemned ship, but said, with his accustomed kindness, "Well, it is a very good chance, this offer of your uncle: his agency in London may be a valuable situation in the course of time, and make you independent of him and everybody

else. Absence, they say, is the strongest test of affection; you will see more of the world, and Rosanna will grow older and wiser as well as yourself."

The rest of his talk was in the same strain, kindly, sensible, and encouraging, as I always found it, except on that night at the play; it confirmed my resolution to decide in the affirmative, and on Friday morning that fact was communicated to my uncle with the best grace I could assume.

"Very well," said he, without looking up from the prices current; "you will be ready to sail on the first of October with the 'Franklin,' a capital vessel, I understand."

The last part of the settlement was telling it to Rosanna. I never looked to her for counsel or assistance in any difficulty, and I dreaded the consequences of the disclosure too much to enter on it hastily. When all was arranged and I must go, I told her the true state of the case; how I had lost my uncle's favour, and probably would never be his heir, but should remain faithful and constant to her in spite of time and distance; should work and save to get a comfortable house for her in London, and come some day to marry and take her home to it.

It was sore trial to see my poor girl's grief; how she wept, and clung to me, and cried, what would become of her when I was gone? I got her soothed at last, we exchanged vows once more, promised never to forget, and always write to each other—I did the most of the promising, for she was jealous of the London ladies, and my thinking small of her when I saw their finery and riches. That happened in our meeting-place, under the sheltering maples in Grovelane, but there was a far more noisy scene at home on my next visit, when Sally worked herself into a fit, with the certainty that men were all deceivers, that I was going away to get off with my engagement, that her sister's heart would be broken, and their family disgraced before all Baltimore. She, too, was quieted at last, but not till our engagement was solemnly renewed in her presence; she had required either an immediate wedding or a direct breaking off; but the impropriety of the first being proved to her, and the second being utterly refused, we got her settled on the renewal, with the help of brother Jeremy.

There were similar demonstrations, but of less intensity, under the maples, and in the second-floor; they passed, however, with the days; I

made my preparations, strong in hope and in the faith of that first love. It was hard to part with Rosanna, but I was going to do a man's duty, and fill a man's place in the world, to be no longer a dependent and a waiter on an old man's will; let me acknowledge it was no hardship to leave her elder sister behind me, yet my own tears fell fast when I clasped the weeping girl to my heart for the last time, under the green maples; we had chosen to part in that trysting-spot, in the soft summer evening, and she sobbed out, "Lucien, dear Lucien, don't forsake me for one of the fine London ladies."

Melrose Morton would see me on board the 'Franklin.' My uncle had bid me good-bye before he went to his counting-house that morning, and hoped I would have a pleasant voyage. It proved to be a long one, even for that period, but I do not intend to relate its incidents. Adventures there were none; but we were out nearly three months, being detained by contrary winds, and I arrived safe in London, with letters of introduction to the house of Palivez, and full powers of agency, but too late to enter on business till the festival was over, so it happened that I sat in the corner of the coffee-room, and

heard my own family's woeful history told to a stranger that Christmas-day.

When I could think over it no more, and afternoon customers began to drop in—they were mostly Russians or Eastern men who frequented that old-fashioned coffee-house—when the fog deepened into that early night which falls upon London in its great pudding time, I rose and retired to the family hotel in Finsbury-place, which my uncle had assigned for my rest, because it was kept by a correspondent of the Quaker lady in Baltimore. There I had my solitary Christmas dinner, and wrote a long letter to Rosanna, to assure her of my safe arrival, my good hope of getting on in London, and my unchanging memory of her, in spite of my uncle's disfavour and the parting sea.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANKER - LADY.

Old Broad-street, where so much Eastern business is still done, and Greek names may be read on every door, as they have been since Elizabeth's time, looked much the same when I pulled the porter's bell at a building which then stood opposite Gresham House, and was known to all City men as Palivez' Bank. The premises have been taken down and remodelled so that their former occupants would not recognise them, but at the time of my story, though presenting an English front with bank office and chambers properly windowed to the public of Old Broad-street, the central and rearward parts remained much as they had been constructed by the original owner, a wealthy Jew, who had the good fortune to remove from Granada in the days of Philip the Second, while the edict of banishment

against all his race was yet brewing in the mind of the Catholic king and his priestly advisers. The Jew's family were long extinct in England. Great firms, chiefly in the Eastern trade, had successively occupied his house, lived and done business there as Eastern firms are apt to do till the present day.

There was a saying in the City that nobody had ever lost money or reared children within its walls, the successive firms had died out or removed to their native lands in wealth and age, and now it was tenanted by the last of the Palivez, one of the wealthiest spinsters in Europe, and highly reputed among mercantile men for abilities to hold her own, and increase the riches and honours of the heirless house. My uncle had sent two letters of introduction with me by way of credentials, one was addressed to Samuel Esthers, Esq., the ostensible manager, and the other to Madame Palivez herself.

His commands to deliver it first had been stringent. I had also received strict orders to get to business as soon as possible, so I rang the porter's bell at the private door on the morning after Christmas, and was admitted by a grey-haired man with a decidedly Greek face, clad in a sort of tunic, girt round the waist with a shawl

of many colours, and loose pantaloons which were never made in England. To him I presented my card and the letter of introduction to madame ; he took them without a word, touched a bell which rang far away in the interior, another servant immediately appeared who, with an Eastern bow, but also in profound silence, opened a door at one side of the passage—by-the-bye, it was beautifully painted and paved with black and white marble—and showed me into a waiting-room fitted up in the best style of old-fashioned comfort and elegance. There I sat beside a bright fire, looked at some half-dozen portraits on the walls—they were full-length and evidently family pictures, for all had the same cast of features, every one Greek, but of the strongest and sternest type—that Hercules might have looked when preparing for his twelve labours, for there was something of desperate resolution against unfriendly stars in all their looks ; they appeared to have been taken at middle life, and their semi-eastern costumes belonged to different ages, but the great preponderance of fur proved that they had been dwellers in the north. I had made these observations when the servant returned “Madame Palivez will see the signor,” he said, in a foreign accent. Let me observe that his attire

was still more Oriental than that of the porter, he wore a purple tunic and a broad amber sash, I rose and followed him through the passage across a central court roofed with glass; there were parterres of beautiful flowers, a marble fountain in the middle, many windows looking into it, a broad marble stair with a gilt bannister led to the first floor; folding doors, half of painted glass, opened on a lofty hall hung round with portraits similar to those in the waiting-room, but more numerous, and some ladies among them.

Its mosaic pavement and walls painted in Arabesque, the deep silence which seemed to reign throughout the mansion, and the ante-room, all hung with old Byzantine tapestry, into which my guide conducted me, had a new and strange effect on my fancy, which was rather heightened when he drew aside one of the massive curtains and ushered me through a carved and gilt archway into a large apartment with high windows of stained glass opening into a conservatory, from which I caught the odour of exotic flowers; the walls and ceiling richly painted with scenes from Eastern lands; the floor covered with Turkish carpeting, a bright wood fire burning on a marble hearth; the furniture composed of large sofas, small tables, bookcases, mirrors, and immense

vases filled with flowers. Almost, in the centre, on a sofa nearly opposite the fire and full in the light, with a richly carved writing-table before her, there sat a lady dressed in a gown or pelisse of purple velvet, closely-fitting and ornamented with gold buttons; hair arranged in long braided bands looped up with gold pins, and a net of the same shining thread. I know not what her age might have been; she was not young, she was not old. The jet black hair shone without a touch of grey; the full dark eyes—I could never settle whether they were black or brown—had a lively brightness like that of early youth; there was not a wrinkle, not a trace of Time's raven footsteps on the straight open brow and smooth cheek.

She might have been called a fair brunette, if such terms can go together, her complexion was so clearly brown. Her features were finely chiselled as those of an antique statue, and of the true Grecian mould, without angle or depression. Her figure was round and full, with sloping shoulders and well-proportioned waist, like those of the classic Venus. There was more of the matron than the maid about it, yet, nothing heavy or large. When she rose and bent to me, I saw that her height was about

middle size, and there was a native grace in all her actions.

“Good morning, Mr. La Touche; please to take a seat,” she said, motioning me to a sofa near her own. “The voice was feminine and sweet, but there was a firm tone in it, and the accent sounded slightly foreign. “I am obliged to your uncle, Mr. O’Neil, for affording me the pleasure of an introduction. He is an old and valued acquaintance of our house, and I trust you will make yourself at home here.”

I made my best acknowledgments. She inquired kindly after my uncle’s health; expressed her great esteem for him, though she had only seen Mr. O’Neil once, and that was many years ago, when business brought him to Dublin. As far as her memory served, she thought I resembled him, but slightly. My own recollection and the opposite mirror both assured me of the fact. I did not resemble my uncle much, and as the Americans say, did not want to, though he evidently stood on high ground with Madame Palivez. From Mr. O’Neil, the lady passed to his business and Baltimore trade in general, and I will confess never to have been more astonished in my life than I was at her intimate knowledge of the whole matter.

Had Madame been clerking in my uncle's counting-house instead of me, she could not have been better acquainted with the transactions of the firm; indeed, there were some secrets of my uncle's policy to which I had never attained, evidently known to her. Yet, while she talked so easily and kindly, the lady was taking my measure. I could not say what made me aware of it; she did not scrutinize me, she did not ask me questions, on the contrary, she looked and spoke as if we had known each other for years; yet there was no intimacy, no partiality in her manner. It was friendly, but that of a superior; not patronising, not condescending, but something which I had never met before in man or woman, and on which I could never presume. Yet she was taking notes of me, person and mind. It might have been her business like habit with all men; but the impression made me confused, and I fear foolish.

“Your uncle,” she said at length, “mentions that his agency will admit of your taking a clerkship here. Our manager, Mr. Esthers—you have brought an introduction to him I believe—requires an English clerk just now. Should the situation suit you, its duties are not very laborious, they will allow you time to transact your

uncle's business ; the remuneration may be of use to you and our clerks generally board on the premises."

There was the cause of my being surveyed and canvassed. The Palivez always kept a native clerk, and I was appointed to fill the position which Jeremy Joyce had occupied in their Dublin establishment. My uncle had told me nothing of that. It did not consist with Mr. O'Neil's policy that his discarded nephew should know he was making such interest for him ; but as madame had remarked, the remuneration would be of use to me. Board on the premises was something to a man without friends or a home in London, and I gathered sufficient composure to say I should be happy to accept the situation, and discharge its duties to the best of my abilities.

"No doubt," said madame, "you will give our manager every satisfaction. Mr. Esthers is an experienced man of business ; punctual and regular himself, he expects similar conduct from all his assistants, but I am sure you have had such excellent training in Mr. O'Neil's office as will make you an acquisition to his, and I believe you will find him kind and considerate. Our place of business is in the front, opening on

Old Broad street. This side of the house is my private residence, but you will easily see the bank entrance, and the porter will show you our manager's room."

I was expected to go; madame had seen enough of me; so I rose and took my leave in some haste and some confusion. She rang a bell hard by her sofa; the same silent servant appeared, conducted me back to the porter's domain, the door was noiselessly opened at my approach, and I found myself again in Old Broad-street.

One ordeal was passed, but there was another to get through. The letter of introduction to Samuel Esthers, Esq., still in my pocket, was probably addressed to the very man I had seen in the Greek Coffee-house, hearing the details of my family misfortune from Watt Wilson. Well, many must have heard it besides him, and the letter must be presented; the clerkship and the agency put together would give good returns, and enable me to marry Rosanna. Strange that I should have come across the Atlantic to fill her brother's place, and serve the Madame Palivez she did not like!

It seemed to me that I did not like the woman either, as I walked a little way along the pave-

ment to re-assure myself and to collect my thoughts.

She had received me courteously, even kindly, considering the difference of our positions, yet I felt relieved to get fairly out of her presence. The silent, half Oriental magnificence which surrounded her in those out-of-the-world back rooms—it was somehow impossible to call them that, but who could have imagined they were in the heart of London?—her singular beauty, her unascertainable age, beyond my own so far, yet not to be thought old; her knowledge of business—it seemed complete mastery of it—so extraordinary in a woman; her manner of speech somewhat antiquated, somewhat scholarly; her foreign accent, her queenly air—all had made an impression upon me, which I could neither shake off nor reconcile myself to.

The bank entrance was easily seen—it was right in front, while the private door of that great house opened at the corner; and no greater contrast would have been found in all the world than the place of business presented to the private residence. The former was entirely after the London fashion, but newer, larger, and better furnished than private banking establishments were wont to be in those

days. The porter showed me the manager's office, a very comfortable business room, where I waited a few minutes, and took a general survey, till, according to my expectation, in stepped the very man to whom Wilson had told our story in the coffee-house. Of course we were perfect strangers, yet I thought he recognised me after the same manner as I did him. I was received civilly, requested to take a seat, and when he had read my uncle's letter, which did not occupy him long, Mr. Esthers formally shook hands with me, and said he was happy to see Mr. O'Neil's nephew. He supposed I understood the business well, and would be inclined to take a clerkship in the bank; my uncle's agency could not occupy all my time, and any active man could fill the two situations. I declared my willingness, on which Mr. Esthers entered into particulars. The salary was one hundred, with board on the premises, but it might be increased. The English clerk worked in his office, himself had a private room of course; the business hours were from ten till five, but sometimes extra work required extra time. I was aware of that, no doubt from experience in my uncle's counting-house. Mr. O'Neil was a superior man of business, and he

had a great respect for him. The manager talked of "our house" exactly as madame had done, but his glory in it appeared to be far greater. His civility to me and his esteem for my uncle were equally made manifest, but Mr. Esthers patronized us both. He took as much note of me as his lady-superior did, but it was taken with keen, scrutinizing looks and probing questions. Did I like business? Did I prefer America or England? How could my uncle spare me? Had he got an assistant in my room? Had I any acquaintances in London? And should I go to Ireland in the holidays to visit my relations? Nobody in their bank got any but three weeks, given some time after St. John's Day, according as he could spare them.

Having satisfied the mighty manager's curiosity on those subjects, and a good many more bordering on my uncle's transactions and my own agency, I concluded the interview by agreeing to all his terms of work and salary, getting three days to see the sights of London and introduce myself to my uncle's brokers. Mr. Esthers gave me hints of their sharpness, and the difficulties I would find in dealing with London people generally, and wished me a very good morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

LUCIEN AND MR. ESTHERS.

I SAW the sights, and also the brokers. The latter consisted of two Greeks and one American, none of them a whit less sharp than I had been admonished to expect, but indispensable to my uncle. The Levantine merchants with whom he dealt were in the habit of paying him in kind, a practice not uncommon yet in that line of trade. The raw silk, dry fruit, and Turkey leather, which they sent in exchange for his tobacco and other American wares, could be frequently sold to better advantage in London than in Baltimore. It was the brokers' business to manage such transactions, but my uncle never trusted anybody entirely, and entire confidence in those gentlemen might not have been the most prudent course. Some one on the spot to look after his interest, and act as a

counter-check, was requisite. Hence my agency supplemented by the clerkship in Palivez' bank, which also took and kept me away from Rossanna. I felt convinced that everything had been arranged chiefly for that purpose; but our persecutors—in which category I now reckoned the entire house in Old Broad-street madame and her manager included—should see that our true love would stand the test of time and separation. For her sake I would accept the position as the best attainable for the present, and be on the look-out for something better and more independent of my uncle and his friends.

I wrote a great deal to her on that subject. There was a long letter penned every evening for some time, and sent *en masse*, regardless of the heavy postage which then prevailed, by the first packet. They unburdened my mind and cheered my heart; and the next American mail brought me one from her, addressed by Jeremy, very ill written and worse spelled, but full of her sorrow for my absence, and warnings not to forget her.

In the meantime, I entered on the combined duties of agent and clerk, got into harness on the appointed morning by sending my trunk

to the bed-room assigned to me on the fourth-floor above the bank, making my appearance in Mr. Esthers' office just as the clock struck ten, and signifying that I had come to be his most obedient servant.

Under my uncle's excellent training, as madame called it—I never could get that woman's words out of mind—habits of business had become as second nature to me, and they are much the same in bank or counting-house. I found no difficulty in falling into the new track; Mr. Esthers, though punctual and regular to an extreme degree, was not a hard master; indeed, but for a strong leaning he had to showing people the worst side of everything that concerned themselves, and an appearance of secret oversight and more than requisite reticence, he was easy and even agreeable to work under. From my first coming he showed me a good deal of civility, and very little of his superiority as manager; seemed rather inclined to take me into confidence on the extent of the firm's transactions, and the heavy responsibility which consequently rested on him, gave me every information, every facility for my own part of the work, was disposed to chat with me familiarly about City men and matters, on which he had

an immense stock of anecdotes and details not generally known. Working in the same office, and well inclined towards each other, Mr. Esthers and I could not fail to get tolerably intimate, yet, as it had been with my uncle, so it was with him, I could never feel at home.

The effect arose from different causes, for Esthers was a different man. Though some fifteen years my senior, of far larger experience, and in high authority, there was nothing about him to inspire that awe and deference which the merchant O'Neil, with his high-bred manner and look of more than princely descent, which he claimed, inspired even American citizens, and kept my youth in fear. 'The Palivez' manager was in speech and bearing every inch a mercantile clerk, and nothing more. Beyond bank and business affairs, his education was extremely limited, except that he had considerable fluency in the use of three languages—English, Russiac, and modern Greek. I had no impression of his being my superior in anything but position; yet something about the man and his ways warned me that there was a side of his character I had not seen, and some circumstances confirmed me in that belief before we had been long acquainted.

In the first place, I observed that while he gave me hints at times very dim and distant, but sufficient to let me know that he was aware of my family's peculiar history, Mr. Esthers never so much as mentioned Watt Wilson, with whom he must have been on intimate terms, and appeared to know nothing of Forbes, the banker, whose name occasionally turned up in our business transactions. Secondly, I found out by the merest accident—by-the-bye, it was a bit of a torn letter which he had not completely burned—that the manager was in close correspondence with my uncle, and the fragmentary words I could decipher made me suspect that he had the supervision of my agency. Perhaps it was not to be expected that the old gentleman in Baltimore could confide in a nephew whose elder brother had set him such an example of dishonour. At how many points of my life would that ruinous remembrance meet me? It kept me solitary and sober in the British capital, as it had done in the American town, and notwithstanding the change of place and scene, my surroundings seemed to have taken the very same colour.

The establishment in Old Broad-street was not exactly like the Quaker lady's boarding-house; it consisted of six clerks, besides myself,

two Russians, two Polish Jews, one Armenian, and, strange to say, only one Greek. He was the oldest man in the house, and next to Esthers in power and trust. None of the rest were young; they had been long in the service and could speak English, but all were reserved, taciturn men. When they did converse it was among themselves, in Russiac, or modern Greek, and generally in low, monotonous tones. The Jews and the Russians sat apart at table—so did the Armenian and the Greek; and each race exhibited the observances of their respective rituals as regarded viands and the disposal of them.

Probably those differences helped to make them an unsocial company, for such they were; none of them liked the manager, and he liked none of them; but that was to be guessed at, not seen. I think they did not like me either; but Esthers informed me they never would like an English clerk; and I also learned from him, though I can't say he wished me to know it, that his cherished ambition was to be thought British born, and neither a Jew nor a foreigner.

The great house accommodated us all well, and we had but the front of it—the ground-floor for business, the first for the manager's private

apartments, and our dining and sitting rooms ; above that, three floors of bedrooms—for every clerk had one to himself—and all looking out on Old Broad-street, for we had no back windows ; there a solid wall divided us from the central court-yard, and prevented the possibility of a peep at madame's private residence. The Spanish Jew was said to have constructed that mansion out of a nunnery which had occupied the site, and fallen to ruin before the Reformation time. I know the sunk-flat was deep, but apparently well furnished, and inhabited by the house-keeper, with three domestic servants, all discreet women, not young, and rather foreign-looking. Madame Oniga, the matron in authority, was a large, tall woman, about fifty, always clad in a gown of black cloth, and a velvet cap trimmed with silver lace ; she had a good many silver rings on her fingers, a Greek cross of the same metal, and a black rosary hung at her left side ; on the right they were balanced by an immense bunch of keys, which rattled as she moved about. Madame Oniga was a Russian born, and, I think, rather proud of the fact. She had the half-Tartar features of the race, and that masculine look which Russian women somehow acquire in advanced life. The woman rarely spoke to any-

body above ground, whatever she did in the sunk-flat; our domestic affairs were well regulated under her management, the cooking was considerable and various, as four creeds had to be suited, and Mr. Esthers would eat nothing but English dishes, and I partly followed his example. I am not sure how it came to my knowledge, but he was no favourite with Madame Oniga, any more than with the clerks. They were almost equal sovereigns, the one having charge of domestic, and the other of business matters. To an outside observer, Mr. Esthers' authority would have seemed weighty and extensive; it was only through being employed in the house that I came to know the great amount of capital it could command, and the important transactions it had, not alone with commercial firms at home and abroad, but also with princes and cabinets. Its credits and its loans were beyond anything I had dreamt of; its management was like clockwork; and its information on mercantile affairs, and all that bordered on the same, most accurate, and sent through private channels, the bearings of which I never knew. But over the bank, and over its managers—yea, over the housekeeper and over all arrangements public and private—there was the invisible

but constant and personal superintendence of the lady beyond the wall. She did not come often within our view: at times we saw her passing to the manager's office, or taking a slight survey of the premises, by way of making her presence publicly known.

On these progresses she deigned to notice me, but not particularly. Madame Palivez knew all her clerks, after the manner of a lady proprietor and head of the house. Sometimes an important client saw her on business in the manager's room. She did not appear often; but there was a passage and door of communication, always locked in the inside, and communicating at once with the corridor leading along the side of the court-yard to her apartments, and with a stair shut in by a fire-proof door, and leading down to the vaults, which may have belonged to the ancient nunnery, and now held the archives and pledges kept by the house of Palivez. Esthers told me there was amongst the latter, plate belonging to a Greek Emperor of Constantinople, and jewels that had been worn by the first Czarina of the Vasiliewilseh line; but he did not tell me what I very well knew before a month's residence in the establishment, namely—that he could not do and scarcely say any-

thing without consulting and being directed by madame. I believe he would have died rather than acknowledge the fact, though every soul about the house was perfectly aware it. Indeed, when I was yet a fresh man in his office, he almost gave me to understand that the real authority resided with him; madame was but the nominal head, being only a woman, and not competent for business; but something in my look, or in his own shrewd sense, must have shown him that it would not do, for he never returned to the subject, and spoke of his sovereign lady as seldom as possible.

Shrewd and sensible Esthers was beyond the wont of cunning people, to which order the manager emphatically belonged. Within the limits of his knowledge and understanding, few could have given better council. No knave but himself could have imposed on Esthers, but his life laboured under strange and discordant burdens. I did not know their full weight then, but our close association in work and living made one thing evident to me. The commonplace, underbred little man had in him a hidden hoard of pride and ambition, sleepless and unquenchable as the subterranean fires; though not very high-pitched, the summits to which

they aspired were mercantile wealth and influence. The acknowledged and uncontrollable head of a first-rate firm was his beau ideal of power and glory. To achieve that position, Esthers would have done anything; but there was no likelihood of his craving after it ever being satisfied, and he appeared to owe all the world ill-will in consequence. I never heard him speak in hearty praise of anybody. His countenance indicated that he was no philanthropist; and except one foolish woman—where is the man who cannot find such?—I never knew a soul who had the smallest liking for Esthers.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. WILSON OFFERS A LITTLE EXPLANATION.

MY arrival in London was signalized by several angry letters for throwing away good prospects, and being able to do nothing for my family, dictated by my grand-aunt, and written by my sister. The well-disposed but ill-educated girl contrived to slip in at the end of every epistle, "dear Lucien, my aunt mad me write this, but I was sorry to do it, and I hope you will excuse your effectionate sister." Poor Rhoda! her orthography was not worse than that of my Rosanna, but her rescue from the farmhouse, and better schooling, occupied less of my attention now. Things must take their course, and it was a far cry to the Antrim shore. The angry letters and the kindly post-script were briefly, I fear coldly, answered. I worked for my uncle and the Palivez. I learned

the peculiarities of the place and the people. I wished to make acquaintance with Watt Wilson, to acknowledge my family debt to his employer, Mr. Forbes, but shrunk from attempting either, on account of the memories it must bring up, and the reflections that might be made on my own altered position.

Some weeks had gone this way, when, crossing the passage to the office one morning—Mr. Esthers was indisposed and had not come down yet—I saw Wilson himself coming forward to meet me.

“I beg your pardon, Mr. La Touche,” said the kindly old clerk, looking half glad and half surprised, “your name is written in your face, as one may say; I never saw a son so like a father.”

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Wilson,” said I extending my hand.

“God bless you, sir,” and he shook it warmly; “I did not think you would remember me so well: what a fine man you have grown! I would have called upon you sooner but I have been in Ireland. Mr. Forbes was kind enough to give me a holiday just after Christmas, and I went to see the old place, and look after an orphan family of nephews and

nieces I have there. Mr. Forbes sent his compliments to you, sir," he continued, when we had sat down in the retirement of the empty office; "he wants you to come to his house and be acquainted with him. He is a good man and a good friend to you and yours; you may know that partly, but not so well as I do."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Wilson, I am sensible of the great kindness he has shown to my family, and would have called to make my acknowledgments, but——"

"He says it was his part to call on you, sir, and maybe it was; I am not up to the high rules of manners, but Mr. Forbes is such a shy nervous man, though he has been in public business all his life. They say it was the death of his wife and two sons that gave him such a shake; it happened the very year before he left Dublin," said Wilson, but I knew what he had been about to say. "Mr. Forbes never got the better of that, sir, and I am afraid never will, he is such a feeling man. I wouldn't speak of it to anybody else, but it is my opinion, Mr. La Touche, that gentleman has grieved as much over your family's trouble as ever one of you did. You can't think what a frightened look was in his face when he asked me in private

if I thought you were at all like the poor boy that was lost—‘like the eldest brother,’ he said in a kind of a whisper; he would go ten miles about rather than mention the boy’s name. I suppose it is thoughts of his own sons that come on him, though none of them were so far grown, only ten and twelve I understand, both at school, and taken with the scarlet fever three months after their mother. She died of rapid consumption, poor woman, and he has neither chick nor child but Miss Helen, the best young lady in the world, but not much to look at, which is a pity, for she will be heiress of all his gatherings. They must be considerable, Mr. La Touche, for he lives in a plain, private way, though except the house you are in, and one or two more, there is not a better banking business in London. It must go to strangers I suppose when he is called away.”

“Has Forbes no relations, then?” I enquired.

“None but distant ones living in Edinburgh; he brought up an orphan nephew, the son of his sister, who married an ensign in Dublin, sore against his will, for the boy was not steady, and partly broke her heart, they say: at any rate she lived only five years after her marriage

—and Mr. Forbes has her son to provide for. When the ensign went to Spain with his regiment and was killed at Salamanca, he put him to school, and brought him up as if he had been his own child. Would have left him the business, I'll warrant, but like father, like son, Master Charles, that was his name, would settle at nothing but running away to sea, which he did before he was fifteen, got into a man-of-war as a cabin boy, and couldn't or wouldn't be got out again. There he is to this day, a sailor; Mr. Forbes has made interest for him and got him promoted to be third mate or something of that kind—a brave, handsome fellow, I am told—but he can't be got to come and see them for the best of invites, being ashamed of his doings, I suppose; he says he will never come till he is made a captain, and that is like to be a good while. But I am running on, sir, and forgetting to give you Mr. Forbes' message: he sends his compliments to you, and will be much obliged if you will come to dine with him on Friday evening, without ceremony. 'Tell him, Wilson,' said he, 'my daughter and I are not people of fashion, but we will be happy to make his acquaintance, and do him any service we can.' Mr. La Touche,

he is the kindest man and the best master that ever lived—not to speak of his friendship to your family—and I hope you'll go ; the house is not far, only two miles from London, on the Uxbridge road ; quite a mansion ; they call it Notting Hill House ; a pretty place, though it is old and rather lonely ; you pass through the village of Notting Hill to it, and anybody will show you the way.

I expressed my thanks to Mr. Forbes, and my intention to accept his kind invitation, if the hours of business permitted.

“ Oh, yes, sir,” said Wilson, “ I forgot to tell you that they never dine till six ; the coach, that goes from the Bank to Tyburn-gate every half hour, will take you most of the way ; they don't keep a carriage, or Mr. Forbes would send it for you.”

“ He is too kind,” said I.

“ He is kind to everybody, sir, and more particularly to you and yours, but—” and Wilson looked slightly confused, “ there is something I ought to tell you about, in his mind. You won't take offence at an old friend—an old follower, I may say ; but when I was in Ireland I went to see Miss Livey and your sister. I should have done it any way, but Mr. Forbes made me pro-

mise I would, because the old woman had been writing to him, saying how hard-up they were, and that you could do nothing now; not that he has let them want, goodness knows; but between ourselves, Miss Livey is getting very shaky in her understanding, and gives poor Miss Rhoda little life.

“Is not she the fine handsome girl, the very model of her mother?—it did my eyes good to see her, and so easy-going and contented like in the midst of her bother, not entirely with Miss Livey, though that would be plenty; but you see, Mr. Hughes, your father’s cousin, married that housekeeper of his last year, and when women get married they will have their say. She and Miss Livey never had a good agreement, and now she wants that bit of the house they have for a sister of hers that is left a widow, and Mr. Hughes wouldn’t be sorry to see their backs turned either, though it ill becomes him, after your father’s kindness; but this is a forgetful world. However, Mr. La Touche, I brought word of it all, as I was bound to do by the wishes of both parties, to Mr. Forbes. I know he means to do something particular for them and you. ‘Wilson,’ said he, when I was done telling him, ‘the best thing for all the

family would be to come here and keep a home for Lucien. I'll engage that none of them will ever want while I have a shilling to spare; there are nice cheap houses to be got in the neighbourhood of London, and they could be looked after there better than in Ireland. It is far off, and there are three helpless women.'

"He was right there, Mr. La Touche; you see Miss Livey has taken that poor thing, Hannah Clark, the last of the widow's daughters; you would not have her left behind, unprovided for as she is, and I know Mr. Forbes will let no heavy burden lie on your shoulders; that's what he is going to speak to you about, sir, and I thought it better to let you know in time."

My first feeling was not one of gratitude to the honest clerk and his kindly master for their solution of my family difficulties. With such a household hanging on me, how was my engagement with Rosanna ever to be fulfilled? But Wilson's last words reminded me that it was my young sister, my poor old aunt, and the last of Widow Clark's dumb and defrauded daughters who were to be considered. Mr. Forbes was right; they would be more easily and suitably supported with myself, than far off in Ireland. My present salary would be sufficient to keep a

home for them in some cheap neighbourhood of London, without his assistance ; it went against my mind, perhaps against my pride, that a stranger should help to maintain my relations, friendly and generous as he had proved himself.

My duty was clear—to take up the burden, and leave the rest to Providence. Besides, like all men of a domestic nature, there was comfort in the prospect of a home and household, whatever its discrepancies might be. I was tired of the unameliorated barrack life which had been my portion in the Baltimore boarding-house and the London bank. I had looked to a different housekeeping, but that could not be for years. What would Rosanna—what would her sister say ? Our affection was to be tested in earnest, yet how would it stand the wear and tear of life, if it did not outlast this trial ? And once more my duty was clear. I told Wilson so on the spot, and thanked him for acquainting me with the matter, before meeting Mr. Forbes.

“I would do a deal more than that, sir, for your father’s son, indeed ; he bid me tell you,” said the honest clerk, “it’s himself that is the real friend to your family ; but, Mr. La Touche, you’ll not be offended with an old follower—I have saved something, having never married,

you see, and it's quite at your service any time."

I thanked Wilson once again; we shook hands over it, and thus made a formal renewal of the old allegiance and sovereignty which had never passed out of Wilson's memory; he was still the clerk, and I was his master's son—his young master in fact, notwithstanding the present equality of our positions. "But, dear me," said the honest soul, as we came to the end of the ceremony, "I am forgetting to inquire after Mr. Esthers; it's seldom one sees the office clear of him in the morning."

I explained the cause of the manager's absence.

"Ay," said Wilson, with a sympathizing shake of his head, "his health is delicate with sitting too close at the desk, I judge, Mr. Lucien," there was a sign of confirmed loyalty which Wilson never more dropped; "he is the steady man, a kind of an example, I may say; between ourselves, if he wasn't of use, I don't think Madame would keep him as a manager, though he is her cousin. She is a wonderful woman for an eye to business; Mr. Forbes tells me he has dealt with the house these four-and-twenty years, and he will be bound there is not

a cheque paid she don't know of, for all so grand and private as she keeps herself.

“He says she did the same in her father's time, when the bank was in Castle-street, in Dublin; the house they had there was nearly as large as this one; they built most of it themselves, nearly a hundred years ago, when they first came from Amsterdam, and the finest part, where they lived in state, and saw no company just as she does here, I am told, was at the back, and opened into Greek-alley. I am not sure that it was not named in their honour; you can't recollect it, Mr. Lucien, never having been in Dublin, and it is not there now; they altered and partly pulled down the place, about seven years ago, to build the Royal Hotel—that is the house for charges—but, as I was saying, Greek-alley is closed up and gone, though it was convenient to the Palivez, and for that matter, to all passengers, being a kind of short-cut round their house from Castle-street to the Liberties.

“Madame used to come and go that way on her Arabian horse: all the Dublin people talked about her riding, and no wonder, for I never saw a woman so much at home in the saddle. She gallops past Mr. Forbes' house every day in the summer time, to and from a sort of country-seat

she keeps down at the end of Kensington Park, a lonely place, but very pretty and foreign like ; no expense spared on it, you see ; she is a wonderful woman ; have you ever seen her, Mr. Lucien ?”

“ Yes, Madame Palivez received me when I called to deliver a letter of introduction from my uncle.”

“ Oh ! to be sure, she has a great respect for Mr. O’Neil, they have had long dealings together ; didn’t you think her very grand and handsome ?—all the young gentlemen do.”

“ Well, yes ;” I wanted to get, not give intelligence, “ she has a Greek face, of course ; is Mr. Esthers her cousin ?”

“ He told me so once ; it was a kind of a let out,” said Wilson. “ I don’t know how it comes, there is not much likeness between them ;” and the rest of his reflections were cut short by their subject walking into the office.

I thought Esthers looked disconcerted at the first sight of Wilson, but he recovered himself instantly, shook hands in a most friendly manner, and inquired familiarly after the health of Mr. Forbes and Miss Helen.

“ They are both well, thank you,” said Wilson.

“I have been calling with their compliments to Mr. La Touche here.”

Once more the manager looked disconcerted, and once more shook it off; said he was happy to hear of Mr. Forbes and his daughter being well. They were excellent people, though he wondered the young lady wasn't afraid to live in that lonely place. He hoped Mr. Wilson would mention that he had been inquiring for them, which the clerk promised to do. Then Esthers sounded my praises in his own peculiar style. I was new yet to London business, and had not been accustomed to such a house as theirs, but he was sure I would learn in time; nothing like experience bought. And after some talk on mercantile news, and a declaration that Mr. Forbes would expect me on Friday, Wilson took his leave.

“You are going to call on Forbes?” said the manager, in his inquisitive, patronising way, as soon as the door closed behind him.

“He has asked me to dine with them,” said I.

It was spoken in the pride of rising fortune, for the wealthy banker was an acquaintance for a friendless clerk to boast of. But I was not prepared for the scowl of malignant anger which darkened Esthers' face, half turned

away as it was, and supposed to be invisible to me.

“You won’t meet very lively society there,” he continued, in a cool, unconcerned tone, while he unfolded a large paper, and made believe to look over it. “Forbes is a good sort of a man, but a regular Scotch Presbyterian—strict and sour—and has brought up his daughter to be the same. I don’t know why they live in that out-of-the-world place, nor what he is saving his money for. People say it is to get an earl’s son for Miss Helen. They are both so proud, father and daughter, nobody good enough to associate with them, if there is the least thing to be said against their utmost generation; I wonder they take notice of you?”

“Mr. Forbes has always shown himself a friend to my family.”

“In spite of all that happened!—well, that’s wonderful! Does he know of your engagement in Baltimore? He will give you good advice about that. There is nobody so set against low matches as these saving Scotchmen. Where is that pocket-book of mine?” and Mr. Esthers departed in search of his conveniency, leaving me in an inward tempest of indignation and amazement, but the latter predominant. What

ends had he for ferreting out my private affairs? I felt sure my uncle had not told him; it was not Mr. O'Neil's fashion to tell the like of his nephew, and why was he so disturbed and angry at my going to the Forbes? Those questions could not be asked of one's manager. Mr. Esthers probably thought he had said enough on the subject, for I heard no more of it, and on the appointed Friday evening took my way to Notting Hill.

CHAPTER X.

MISS FORBES AND HER FATHER.

ON Friday, as I said, I soon found my way to Notting Hill. The place is now a large and handsome suburb of London—the chosen retreat of city men, and people who have come home from India. There are streets and roads, squares and crescents, with a more than common allowance of garden ground and noble old trees dispersed among them, showing how the town has overgrown the woodlands. But when I first saw it in the lengthening twilight of a pleasant evening about the middle of February, 1817, there was nothing but a hamlet of low cottages standing on the highest and most shady ground in the Uxbridge road, between two parks, the largest and most ancient in the neighbourhood of London, not twenty minutes' walk from Kensington, where the sunset light of court and fashion still lingered, and within two miles of Tyburn, where people still talked of seeing executions; yet

one of the most secluded and out-of-the-way villages one could wish for when intending to retire from the world and its vanities.

A boy who had been playing with his fellows in the gutter, showed me the way to Notting Hill House. The low-pitched, but comfortable old mansion, stands where it did, at the east end of Holland Park, on a rapidly rising ground, with lawn in front and garden in the rear, but it is called by another name now; has been repaired and remodelled by a city merchant—peace be upon him and his house, for I know him to be a worthy man. They have built a square hard by, with tall houses in it, and much curtailed the garden ground; but when I first saw the old place, it stood alone on the slope of the wooded hill where the parks of Holland and Kensington almost met; an avenue of noble trees leading up to its gates; winter flowers blooming in its lawn and garden; the red fire-light flashing from its windows, through the thick-growing evergreens, and the whole looking as if it were situated somewhere in the mid-land counties.

Our first meeting with anybody of whom we have heard or thought is an occasion to be remembered, and I had thought of Mr. Forbes in

no ordinary manner. He was the only friend my family had found in their long adversity ; the man whose generous sympathy with them and me had proved as true as it was uncommon. His wealth and mercantile status should have made his acquaintance or patronage a thing to be sought after by any man in my position : yet his invitation was more of a trial than a triumph to me. An unaccountable shrinking had always come over me at the thought of meeting him ; perhaps it was an admonitory dread of the advice against which I had been warned, but I chid myself for it determinedly as I rang at the gate. It was opened by an elderly, respectable-looking servant, with no pretensions to livery ; he showed me up the lawn, across the oak-floored hall, and into the drawing-room—a ground-floor apartment with carved wood ceiling, rather low, old-fashioned but handsome furniture, and a wide bay window.

From behind its hangings of green damask, where she seemed to have been looking out so as not to be seen, there came, slowly and awkwardly, a lady in a high dress of plain, brown silk. Her figure was small, thin, and slender, with those least attractive characteristics of woman's form, high square shoulders, and a narrow chest. Her com-

plexion was dimly fair, without a tinge of colour. Her hair was of a similar hue, thin, and tightly put up. There was nothing striking about her face, except that it was of an uncommon size and leanness, with features to match. Yet as she approached me, and collected all her composure in the fading light, I could see that I had to do with a gentlewoman. She made me a courteous inclination, saying, "Miss Forbes;" then kindly extended her hand, and added, "I am happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. La Touche, papa has told me so much of you. He will be here in a minute."

I pressed the offered hand; it was small and fair as that of my own Rosanna, and there was no awkwardness about the lady now; she recommended me a seat close by the bright, blazing fire, asked if I had any difficulty in finding my way to their lonely old house—it was rather an out-of-the-way place, but very pleasant in the summer time, and papa liked it; his health was delicate, and would not agree with living in town.

While I was expressing my high opinion of the situation, a tall and decidedly Scotch-looking gentleman stepped in, with a likeness to my early friend Melrose Morton in his air and manner which almost startled me; but he looked at least

thirty years older, had perfectly grey hair, and a face that told of heavy cares, personal suffering, or some great sorrow not to be shaken off or worn away by time; and she said, "Here is papa."

I could believe that Mr. Forbes was a nervous man, for he received me—his deep debtor, and in a manner his liege man—kindly, indeed, but with a look of one who had screwed up his courage to some duty, and would go through with it. His daughter seemed to be aware of his difficulties, and helped him over them, not taking upon herself, but screening, his embarrassment with gentle, womanly tact.

In the distribution of nature's gifts, little beauty had fallen to Helen Forbes' share; yet I thought then, as I did many a time after, notwithstanding my own unlucky part in her history, that a wiser and better man might have lost his heart to her, as readily as I did mine to the beautiful girl in Baltimore. I have given a true description of her appearance at first sight; but I have not described, and no words of mine could do justice to the feminine grace and dignity of her habitual manner, the sweetness of her smile—which even at its brightest had something tender and melancholy in it—and the pure, ear-

nest, loving soul that looked out of her deep brown eyes. She had seen little of what is called society—little of the world in any department. Her schooling had been at home, and her travels extended no farther than her father's removal from Dublin to London; but a sound English education, some accomplishments, and more natural taste and sense, made her an agreeable and interesting companion. Her age was twenty-six—just three years above my own—but she looked thirty. I think she was quietly cheerful by nature; but some wintry shadow had fallen upon her youth, making it sad and sober, as her father looked in the midst of his growing wealth and rising position. Whence that cloud had come I could not imagine then; but as one that must get an explanation, I set it down to the account of their Scottish Calvinism, for the Forbes were Presbyterians—neither strict nor sour, as Esthers had reported them; but both father and daughter seemed to have come to that melancholy conviction of life's being but a task and a trial which appears to me, though I have no reason to give for it, the peculiar characteristic of Scottish piety in modern times.

There was no company but myself expected, and I had the honour of conducting Miss Forbes

to the dining-room. We passed through the library to it: as usual in old mansions, all the rooms communicated, and were all furnished in the same antiquated but elegant style. The attendants I saw were all Scotch, elderly and respectable, evidently attached to the family, and long in the service. Miss Forbes presided, as she had done over her father's house and table from her sixteenth year. A better hostess could not have been found in London; with her assistance, and our own inclination, Mr. Forbes and I slid quietly into acquaintance.

Unready as both parties had been to meet, we took kindly to each other as soon as that terrible ordeal to all true Britons, the first encounter, was fairly over. He was a sensible, courteous, amiable man, with a good deal of Scotch prudence, and what is not incompatible with it, however Southern men may sneer, genuine generosity of practice and opinion.

I never heard Forbes speak ill of anybody, if he could help it. I know that his large but discriminating charity was the stay and the praise of his poorer neighbours. Servants, clerks, and friends, people of every degree who knew him best, could tell of help from his purse, or influence given to struggling men in their sore neces-

sity, and kept from the world more closely than his private accounts.

Forbes had some pride too—I never knew an honest Scotchman who had not; his walls were covered with the portraits of his ancestors, highland chiefs, ministers, and among the rest, Sir William Forbes, the famous Edinburgh banker, of whom my host was a lineal descendant. We got into acquaintance—into conversation, first on public news, then on subjects nearer home, and by the time the cloth was removed, and Miss Forbes left us, we were almost on the footing of old friends taking up the threads of their companionship after long separation. It was not the wine that did it, at least on the banker's part; while he pressed the excellent old port on my attention with sincere hospitality, and I could not help remarking it was good wine, he merely tasted it, said, "It is good, lad," and then, with the look of an anchorite casting temptation from him, filled up the half-empty glass with cold water.

I suppose he saw something like surprise in my look, and I wished he had not the next moment, for the troubled, terrified expression of the man's face at once impressed me with the conviction that there was some peculiar crack or

twist in the brain which seemed otherwise so sound, and I took a fixed resolution never to observe any eccentricity of his in future. We were friends, and we talked in a friendly manner. When he had drunk his watered glass, and got over the small upset, Mr. Forbes entered on my family affairs with equal sense and kindness. He cut short my acknowledgments of all we owed him, with—

“Lucien, my lad—I can’t call such young men as you Mr.—and since you are pleased to think I have been of any use, will you do me one favour in return?”

“Anything in my power, sir.”

“Thank you, lad. Well, just never say another word about the little I have done, or may do, to help folk better than myself, but not so well provided. Won’t you try this Burgundy?”

I declined the wine, and made the promise on which he insisted with such an earnest look; and we fell to discussing the proposed settlement of my relations. The discussion was brief and easy. I had made up my mind to accept his views upon every subject except Rosanna. If Mr. Forbes had heard anything of that matter, he said nothing. I got good advices, but they were such as my own heart

and conscience concurred in, and given in a friendly, confidential manner—not in the tone of the patron or admonisher which I had been led to expect.

We grew friendly—we grew familiar. I felt as if Mr. Forbes were no stranger to me, and the cause was plain to my after thinking. It was not alone that he knew the history of my family, and had been their steady almost their only friend; but his resemblance to my early help and adviser, Melrose Morton, went beyond that of air and general appearance, which struck me at first sight: he had the same sound judgment, the same high principles, honesty of word and deed and consideration, which took in every title of other people's difficulties. Forbes was an older and a sadder man; he had lost a wife and children; doubtless it was that long sorrow which pressed upon him still—health and heart seemed to have bowed under the burden, in spite of worldly prosperity. It was strange to me, young as I was, that time and good fortune had not closed or covered that rent in his life; but certain it was that the regret or the memory seemed to me the only difference between him and Melrose Morton.

We had settled everything—the removal of

the three women to London : they were to march under Wilson's conduct, as it would not have been expedient for me to quit Palivez' bank, or ask leave of absence so soon.

“They are all strangers to you,” said Mr. Forbes ; “ there is no use you opening your family affairs to them. Wilson is a discreet, respectable man ; your grand-aunt knows him long and well ; he will manage everything as well as you could do, perhaps better, for he is not such a stranger in the country. I can spare him for a fortnight, or longer, if need be ; he will bring them safe ; and as you have not time to earn much yet—as I know you will, lad—I will do myself the pleasure of bearing their expenses. I'll take no denial, no thanks, either. Lucien, remember your promise. Where do you think of taking a house ?”

“ I am not quite sure, sir.” My mind was getting confused on the subject of the motives, yet nothing but downright generosity could explain his conduct.

“ Well,”—Forbes watered another glass for himself—“ I was going to ask you to be my tenant. I have got some house-property in that new neighbourhood of Bayswater, not a step from this, just through the turnpike-gate. Some

London speculators took a turn for building there last year, nearly opposite the Palace-gardens. They were to make a town of it, and commenced with Moscow-road, in Petersburg-place, in honour of the Emperor of Russia, who made himself so popular when the allied sovereigns visited us. They partly built the place, and there it stands—a half-square of decent little houses, with small gardens in front and rear. But the road never got finished; people thought it too far out of town, too lonely, too new; the chief speculator had gone beyond his depth, and was bankrupt before the end of the season; the place was in the market, and I bought it pretty cheap. Some retired quiet people, who partly knew me, have come out to live there; they can do so as economically as in the country: the widow of one of our Scotch ministers, a doctor's family who have lost their father, a lieutenant on half-pay with his wife and children, and two or three more equally respectable neighbours, would make one vacant house which I happen to have on hand, an eligible residence for you and your family. Yes, my lad, you are getting a household about you early; but there is nothing like an apprenticeship to any business, especially when it is one's duty. There is no other way to the bless-

ing which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow, Lucien. But as I was saying, they could live nicely and quietly there; you could come out and in to them by any of the coaches from the Bank. It is a fine walk for a young man in fair weather, too. You would be near neighbours to Helen and me; we could help one another in any time of emergency—they are always coming in this uncertain life; and you could come and see us very often. We are lonely people, and not much given to company, neither myself nor Helen, young as she is—maybe I have brought her up too much out of the world, but it is an evil one, and there were family reasons,” said Forbes, with a sort of wince.

I saw the prudence and eligibility of his plan—how much forethought the wealthy banker took for me and mine—and I at once accepted the house in Petersburg-place. He wrote out an order for his agent to let me see the premises on the back of his own card, and as we adjourned to the drawing-room, said in a careless, easy way: “You need not trouble yourself about furnishing, that is all done to your hand; ‘a melian is nothing without a plenishen,’ as they say in Scotland.”

I would have thanked him, but he shook his head at me, and we entered the large, hand-

some, well-lighted room, to find Helen sitting alone by the fire knitting, with a large snow-white cat by her side. How old and retired, and settled down she looked! but how friendly and unembarrassed we three had grown.

I felt myself a kind of a cousin to the Forbes'—they were acting a part not common among cousins; that both father and daughter seemed pleased with my company, and cheered up by my conversation, helped to lighten the weight of so much of unmerited and unaccountable kindness. Before we parted, Forbes himself arranged that I should spend every Saturday evening with them. All banks closed earlier on that day, and the proposal reminded me once more of Melrose Morton and our Saturday afternoons at the grammar school.

CHAPTER XI.

LUCIEN'S NEW HOME.

IN pursuance of the plan agreed on that evening, I wrote to my aunt and sister earnestly requesting them to come to me in London, and bring Hannah Clark with them, promising that not one of the three should ever want, and enjoining them to put themselves and their affairs entirely under the conduct of Watt Wilson, who cheerfully undertook the commission.

“It’s proud I’ll be,” said our ancient and still loyal clerk, “to bring along the last of the La Touches of Armagh. It minds me of the times when the master couldn’t get away himself, and used to send me to bring the missis home from the salt water”—he meant the sea-side. “I’ll bring them safe and sound, never fear, Mr. Lucien; I wish it was to a castle they were coming, or to your own grand establishment

that will be seen in the city some day," and Wilson looked profoundly impressed with the truth of his own prediction.

Then I presented Mr. Forbes' order to his agent, the only tradesman in the place. He kept a general shop, consisting of his parlour window at the corner, and I took a formal survey of our intended residence. The small semi-square known as Petersburg-place, has still a retired look of country quiet, though the Moscow-road which was to lead to it has been long built with many another road and place in the populous and now busy neighbourhood of Bayswater. There is no traffic, no concourse there. Eyes familiar with London localities will perceive that the houses are old-fashioned, intended for, and still occupied by persons of limited respectability, though rather dingy and closely built upon; but at the time of my formal survey, they stood like a detached hamlet, in the open fields opposite Kensington Palace gardens, sheltered on the north side by a few tall trees, a remnant of Kensington Park, which was first cut into at that quarter, and still gives its name to many a square and terrace, new built, new painted, and with more garden ground than they can boast of now. The place had but one

street lamp, an ancient oil one, for gas had not yet shown on London city. The twopenny post did not come out so far, no watchman was thought necessary to the maintenance of its peace, the inhabitants had not much to lose, but they barred their doors well at nightfall, and went with all their difficulties to Mr. Forbes' agent. The house he showed me over, number nine, was as well finished as any there, and very respectably furnished.

"They did it all themselves, sir, he and Miss Helen," said the agent, "that is, they gave the orders and looked after the doing of them, for a relation, I think, or some genteel person as changed their minds, the more fools they, I can tell them, there is not such a landlord from this to Mile-end as Mr. Forbes, no screwing up rents or shuffling out of repairs with him."

"I am quite sure of that; but what is the rent?" said I.

"Well, sir, it just astonishes myself; you are the gentleman named in the order—Mr. La Touche, I suppose?"

"The very same."

"Then, sir, it is forty pound to you; mind, you will never get the like of it."

"Never," said I, endeavouring to keep my

composure, for pride and gratitude were striving within me. Mr. Forbes and Miss Helen to look after the furnishing of a house, and let it to me and my relations at a nominal rent! would Providence ever enable me to return the obligations I owed that man? I took the house on a seven years' lease, as the agent said he was instructed to propose to me. I made some other arrangements requisite for commencing house-keeping in the neighbourhood of London—by-the-bye, Mr. Forbes directed my inexperience through the medium of his agent, the man of the general shop, in the parlour window; he gave me sundry suggestions, and I guessed where they came from. The wealthy banker had more Scottish tact, more genuine delicacy, than to meddle overtly with the domestic affairs of the poor family he was assisting at all points. In due time, according to the postal arrangements of that period—what a different world it is from eight-and-forty years ago—I got a response written and spelled in Rhoda's usual style, setting forth their difficulties about coming, because Miss Livey was afraid I would send for that girl in America and get married; but come they would, for that woman in the farm-house would not let them stay, "and, dear Lucien," said

Rhoda in her P.S., "I hop you will not be asshamed of us before your grand freends in London."

About a fortnight after the receipt of that communication, I was at London Bridge, pacing about the pier one clear cold evening and waiting for the arrival of the Belfast packet, which was to bring Wilson and my intended household. The wind had been fair, and the packet came in not an hour after she was due. The custom-house officers had done their duty on board against the unpaying importation of Irish whisky. The passengers began to come ashore, and I saw Watt Wilson conducting an old infirm woman, thin, wrinkled, much bent by years and rheumatism; and a substantial, rosy rustic—I had almost said vulgar looking—young one, whose bringing up in a farm-house nobody could doubt. They were dressed in coarse blue gowns of linen, shapeless straw hats, shabby shawls; and there were my active, high-tempered, bustling, grand-aunt, Miss Livey, and the pretty child who used to play with me, of whose grown-up resemblance to Rosanna I had quite convinced myself—my long-remembered sister Rhoda. They were followed by a still more shabbily dressed girl, with a half-wild, half frightened look,

gazing at everything with open mouth and eyes, and making strange noises, whom Wilson held fast by the hand and vainly endeavoured to quiet, as I, feeling that no foreigners could be half so strange to me, came forward to the group, and he said—"Here we are, Mr. Lucien."

I remember being kissed and hugged on the spot by my old aunt; being stared at, and then awkwardly shaken hands with by my sister; having some trouble to keep the dumb girl from running away for fear of me; helping Wilson to get a deal chest, two spinning-wheels, and a reel safely landed; getting the entire party into the Uxbridge coach, which left us close on Petersburg-place, and duly installing them in number nine. I was probably as strange to their sight and memory as they were to mine. I think their expectations were not so far disappointed in me. Lucien had been the gentleman of the family for a considerable time, and the idea seemed to have got an overwhelming confirmation by the first sight of me. On my part, no evidence of disagreeable surprise was permitted to be visible. When the first shock of the meeting was over, I welcomed and almost rejoiced to gather these remnants of a once happy and long-ruined home once more around

me ; however unlike what I had expected to see them, they were my nearest living relations—the two that kept me from being alone in the world. Wilson ably assisted in the settlement, stayed with us to supper, helped to make us acquainted with each other, as sixteen years of separation required, drank our healths and went home to his sister in Hammersmith, rejoicing that the La Touches had got a house of their own again.

Days passed, and things worked themselves into their new channels ; so did myself and family. The deal chest was unpacked ; the spinning-wheels established. The bewilderment of their long voyage, the strange place, the strange Lucien, began to wear off my aunt and sister : the one ceased to sit and look at me as if she had never seen the like before ; the other gave up speaking in a frightened whisper ; even the dumb girl got reconciled to my presence, and did not jump away when I opened the door. In short, we settled into something like domestic order. All women know how to assume the government within four walls. My aunt took the general oversight, my sister the practical housekeeping, and Hannah Clark devoted herself to the duties of the maid-of-all-work. It

was the train of life they had followed in the end of the Antrim farm-house. I don't believe that any power or change of circumstances could have kept them out of it, and, situated as we were, it seemed the most practicable. I went out to Palivez' bank every morning, and came home to them at night, having arranged to that effect with Esthers.

He had first thought it was not according to the rules of the house for me to sleep out of it; the Palivez always liked to keep their people close about the business; but when I talked of applying to madame, he said there was no necessity, and took the opportunity to suppose, that with such a houseful of women on my hands, I would never think of marrying now.

Well, I had got a house and home, and could earn sufficient to keep it honestly, had there been no generous banker living within half a mile. I had a sister to manage the establishment, an aunt to keep things proper, a maid whom they could regulate, and the consciousness of doing my duty. The uncared-for, uncompanionable days of boarding-house and bank life were over; there was a family to bid my outgoing good-bye, and welcome my return—to meet at the breakfast-table, and sit with at

the evening fire. This was what my domestic nature had pined for through many a solitary year; yet with what drawbacks are our wishes granted and our choices given! Before the first week had fairly elapsed, I was made sensible, in spite of my best endeavours to think the contrary, that the days of boarding-house and bank were blest with comfort and quiet never to be attained in number nine. It was not alone in aspect or attire, accent or manner, that my new-found relations differed from me and those with whom I associated.

The years which I had spent in city life, with all its appliances and civilizations, they had passed in the end of a farm-house on the Antrim shore; and let me observe that remote farm-houses in the north of Ireland were then a long way behind similar establishments on the London road. Boiling potatoes, making butter, and spinning flax were the three branches of domestic economy with which they were thoroughly acquainted, but beyond these neither their experience nor their knowledge extended. It was not within the scope of my acquirements to alter or enlarge their housekeeping views; but when carpets looked as if chickens had been fed on them—when plates and dishes showed marks

of dirty fingers—when chops and steaks were burned to so many cinders—I could not help being aware of the fact, and wishing for some improvement.

It was a vexation to see the pretty furniture which Mr. Forbes and Miss Helen had looked after, according to the agent's account, soiled, scratched, and every way misused by hands unaccustomed to anything capable of injury; while the glass, china, and all sorts of brittle ware suffered to a frightful extent, from their being habituated to nothing but tin and pewter. Very few meals passed off without a smash; but these were not the only disagreeable noises in our establishments. Like most of what are called deaf mutes, poor Hannah Clark possessed the power of speech, but not that of hearing, and made it manifest by unintelligible sounds, or rather shouts, which, strange to say, conveyed her meaning to my aunt and sister, and were responded to by answering shouts and signs, putting me in considerable fear of indictment for nuisance, as their conversation, generally carried on with open doors, was sufficient to disturb a much less quiet neighbourhood.

Poor Hannah was taller and more slender than my sister, but robust and active. She was

tolerably handsome, too, though her face had something of Sally Joyce's edge—keen of eye and apprehension, but utterly uneducated as regarded mental training. How difficult it is to guess at the powers of thought that are locked from us in perpetual silence, yet speech and hearing are but the instruments of the mind! Hannah had one of her own without them, as after-time made plain to me; for the present she showed but a quick eye for sign and look, a ready hand for all manner of work that was known to her, including fine spinning, and a temper which, though generally good and easy, might be dangerous if overmuch crossed or excited.

My grand-aunt, the once notable Miss Livey, came next to her in right of peculiarity. She was far altered from the woman I remembered so upright, active, and wiry; but her ancient affection for old caps and gowns had been confirmed by time and circumstances; her long occupation of the corner of a farm-house, not particularly kept, made the neatly-furnished London rooms irreconcilably uncomfortable to her age; her long-drawn battle with the cousin's housekeeper, and perhaps the pressure of years and poverty, had turned the high temper, whose

breaking forth was the terror of my childhood, to a sour and continuous grumble, as spirited wine is apt to turn to vinegar; a habit of observing the faults, flaws, and wrong sides of everything, which Esthers himself could not have rivalled, and of descanting on them without cessation to the nearest listener, or, if need were, to herself alone.

Poor old woman! she had not become a pleasant home-companion; but the consolatory doctrine of the back being fitted to the burden never found a more forcible illustration than in my sister Rhoda. Her figure was short and solid, her face round, rosy, and good-humoured, with pretty blue eyes and glossy brown hair; it was kept strictly tidy, so were her linen gown and check apron (I got her to change them for print and muslin); Rhoda liked to be dressed as well as other girls—liked to be admired, I suppose, but nature had blessed her with a disposition so easy, so acquiescing in everything that came in her way, that effort or endeavour after improvement were out of the question. It was not resignation to the inevitable, which most of us learn in process of time, but downright contentment and satisfaction with the case as it stood, however that might be.

Rhoda had been content spinning in the end of the solitary farm-house; she was content when the exceeding strangeness wore off, listening to her aunt grumbling in number nine; and had it been Rhoda's lot to sweep chimnies she would have been perfectly contented with the soot. Whoever took the government of her, got it; whatever statutes were promulgated, she obeyed, always finding a corner of her own to retire from them, and a subject of cheerfulness or consolation under every difficulty. That character had enabled her to live, ay, and thrive, through the misfortune, the successive deaths, the poverty and cheerless years which she had seen. It enabled her to endure Miss Livey, to find companionship in Hannah Clark, and to take no annoyance from what she called my genteel ways; but it also prevented her from ever advancing in manner or appearance. A new bonnet or gown were always welcome to her; she sat upright at table when told of it, and handled her fork properly when reminded of the same; she took private lessons from me in writing and spelling, would sit at it diligently while under my eye and command; but I never knew her to improve in word or letter. Rhoda was my affectionate sister till the end of the chapter—that is to say,

about six months' teaching, when I gave it up in despair. Yet, as we came to know each other better, the girl was not without sense and judgment of a sound practical kind; there was nobody one could have consulted on heart or home subject with a better chance of getting good counsel: if she did not understand the matter, Rhoda would say so plainly.

I think liberation from pride was one of the great causes of her contentment, and, as concerned character of man or woman, she had an insight which certainly came from nature, not from opportunity. Moreover, though she never spelled the word correctly to my knowledge, Rhoda was affectionate to her grumbling old aunt, whose converse with her varied between high and low scolding—to poor Hannah, who had been her only companion all the farm-house time, and chiefly to myself; her memory had remained faithful to her childhood's love, through long years of change and separation; it was still true to her far estranged brother, in spite of his genteel ways, and the sometimes too evident probability of "his being ashamed of her." She was proud of Lucien, thought he had a right to be a gentleman, whatever troubles the fact occasioned her, regarded his interests more wisely

than he did himself at times, and he has lived to know the value of that sister.

In the meantime, I tried hard to get my new household into my ways, or bring my mind to put up with theirs for peace and duty's sake. It was not an easy effort, though Watt Wilson came to my assistance. They knew him best; he was the one friend with whom they could talk in their own fashion, without being on the height of good behaviour, which is not a pleasant position for anybody. He heard Miss Livey's complaints and Rhoda's perplexities with the new state of things; he advised them on the conduct of domestic matters; the bachelor-clerk had a surprising knowledge of the like, he made no difficulty in setting them right on the spot; and with my grateful concurrence, he brought his sister from Hammersmith to help in their reclamation.

She was a sensible, honest creature, like himself, but burdened with a large family and a small income, which her brother's boarding in the house somewhat increased. I knew she would be a congenial acquaintance, and they had need of such, besides the grand object of her introduction, which Mrs. Mason seemed perfectly to understand, and did her

best to accomplish. It is but fair to acknowledge that some amelioration was effected in course of time, but number nine never could be boasted of as a neat and orderly establishment, and I found myself as solitary within its walls as ever I had been in boarding-house or bank. Companionship with my grand-aunt was out of the question, at her best days, Miss Livey had been intelligent only on Irish house-keeping, and now, her retirement to bed, which occurred early and often, was a positive relief to the whole premises.

Rhoda's education and mine were too far apart to make association pleasant on either side. The good girl learned to sweep and dust the sitting-room before I came home, light two candles, and leave me to my books and meditations, whilst she retired to the litter and liberty of the kitchen, from whence her noisy conversation with Hannah—I never was sure which made the most noise—resounded through the house, till I rang the bell, and my aunt shouted down to them from her bed-room on the first-floor.

There was no help for it. But little of my time was passed at home, and the less seemed the better; besides, one gets used to anything,

and I had a standing invitation to the Forbes' every Saturday evening, which grew into a regular and customary thing with them and me. It was the only form of society I had, and besides myself there was very little company at Notting Hill House. They visited number nine in due form, after waiting with Scottish tact, and, let me add, consideration, till we were fairly settled. Miss Helen came often after, but they were evidently visits of duty and of charity. She listened to Miss Livey—it was my good fortune to be generally out at the time—she talked to Rhoda as much as possible, and tried to give religious instruction to Hannah Clark; but the poor girl never could be got to remain quiet long enough, much less to comprehend one of the serious truths Miss Forbes endeavoured to impress upon her.

Helen deplored the fact, so did her father, and often exhorted me to labour for Hannah's enlightenment, as opportunity served. The work was not to my mind, perhaps not within my capacity. I put them off with promises of attempting it some day, then I reasoned myself out of its possibility; Hannah remained untaught, but nevertheless did her work in the

world, as most of us do, with or without instruction.

I had a harder task about this time in disclosing the new aspect of my affairs to Rosanna, according to the policy which I had instinctively adopted from the dawn of our acquaintance—by-the-bye, it was the unconscious counterpart of my uncle's towards myself—she got precise information when everything was settled. No help of thought or counsel could be expected from that quarter: I was getting more and more clear-sighted on the subject, and it was easier to tell all when the business was done, and arguments and persuasions were useless.

How would she bear to hear of such a hindrance to our union? I had said everything a man could say, in a long letter of my unalterable constancy and attachment to her alone. I had set the duty I owed to my family before her in the clearest light, and I had given hopes which my own mind scarcely entertained of better days in prospect. Yet I waited with considerable anxiety for the arrival of the next packet. At length it came, and I was relieved beyond

telling by the first reading of Rosanna's letter. There was a deal of ill-spelled grief in it—fears that my relations wouldn't like her, and renewed jealousy of the London ladies; but Rosanna's heart was not broken by the intelligence; she wound up with an account of a new bonnet, and how well she looked in it, and an old gentleman who had taken to gazing at her from over the way, but she always hid behind the window-curtain, and wouldn't mind him; and concluded with the announcement that Sally was giving Jeremy no peace to come home again, for America didn't answer her health at all.

I read that passage over a second time, and not with the joy of heart which might have been expected. To see my Rosanna again, and read my welcome in her laughing eyes, I would have taken a long journey in any weather; but the prospect of her elder sister coming to my side of the Atlantic had more of fear for me than I would have cared to confess. But the voyage was long, and they were only thinking of it; Sally thought about many impracticable things, and this might be one of them.

I sent back a soothing letter, full of reiterated vows and good advice, both honestly meant; and I fretted in secret because there was no prospect, no probability of taking my poor girl to myself away from her termagant sister—whom I knew she was so willing to leave—and from the unsafe, uncomfortable life she led in that far-off street in Baltimore.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUDDEN APPEARANCE AND A TALK WITH HELEN
FORBES.

MELROSE MORTON and I had corresponded regularly since my arrival in London—it had been his last stipulation when he left me on board the ‘Franklin’—and the same packet by which I heard from Rosanna brought me a letter from him, warmly commending the course I had taken, and assuring me that the sacrifice would be remembered and rewarded, if not in this world, certainly in that better one to come.

“You have begun well, Lucien,” he said, “in taking upon yourself the duty most evidently set before you, and I hope, above all things, that you will persevere in it. Remember it is far better never to undertake a thing than to tire of it or stop midway—

this can only bring evil to ourselves and to others, the curse pronounced against him that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh back, is ratified by reason and experience as well as revelation. But I know you counted the cost before you began to build the tower; and I also know that He who called you to this duty can find means to reconcile it with your wishes, should they seem good in His sight.”

My trust in Morton's judgment had grown stronger as my own strengthened with man's estate and experience. I had written everything to him—my family difficulties, Mr. Forbes' unexampled kindness, my intimacy at his house, and opinions of him and his daughter—how good, and yet how sober and sorrow-stricken they seemed. He had passed my account of them with very little remark—they were evidently strangers, in whom he took no interest; my private affairs occupied him too much to think of mere acquaintances; and I was thinking of the half-prophecy of good days to come, contained in his last letter, by way of consolation under the above-mentioned fret and the household annoyances enlarged on in the last chapter, which happened

to be more than commonly demonstrative that Saturday evening. I had made my escape from them to Notting Hill House, the only city of refuge then known to me.

The spring was coming fast—violets and the early primroses were blooming in the lawn and at the roots of the old trees in the avenue; the lengthening day made my accustomed hour some time before sunset—perhaps I had come early too—and when the servant had shown me into the drawing-room Miss Forbes had not come down from dressing, and her father had not come home from business; but I was no stranger now, and I took my seat at the bay window to enjoy the fine prospect of park and pasture-land which the early spring was making so freshly green.

It was a soft, clear evening for that season: the western sky was red with the setting sun, and a light wind stirred the tops of the tall trees. One could have imagined himself in the heart of the country—a hundred miles from London—the place looked so sylvan and retired. From the height on which Mr. Forbes' house stood, I could see far into the old Kensington Park, which then covered the opposite slope;

they had begun to cut into it here and there, and there was one wide path straight before my window, wild and grassy, growing narrower as it went up among the thick trees, and cheered by a small bright stream, that played and sparkled down the wooded hill-side. It looked like a forest glade. I half expected to see the fallow deer come out of the shade and drink at that wild stream.

The place is a broad road now, leading up to the parish church of St. John's, with small houses on either side, a few tall trees in the centre, and the stream gone out of sight and into the service of the Water Company; but as I sat and looked on it by the light of the setting day, a lady, mounted on a beautiful bay horse, wearing a dark green riding-habit, with black hat and feather, came up from the Uxbridge-road, in a style of rapid but graceful riding which might have served Diana when hunting without her train. I had never seen her but once, and in a different trim; but the air and figure were not to be mistaken, and I recognised Madame Palivez. No groom rode behind her; she turned up the wild grassy path at a gallop, as if bound for the depths of the park; but half way up the slope she drew bridle, alighted

with an ease and activity I had not thought practicable in a lady's riding gear, and stood with her hand on the horse's neck, while the beautiful creature, evidently from the land of the gazelle, stooped and drank at the stream.

The forest scene never appeared to me so complete as now. The Arab horse curvetted, bowed its graceful neck under its mistress's hand; I saw her pull off her glove to stroke it as she stood there and looked about her, up through the tall trees, down the grassy path, and at last at the house and window where I was sitting. Did she see and know me at that distance? I fancied she did. Would it be stepping out of my poor clerk's place to bow or give any sign of recognition? But next moment her eyes were turned away. Madame Palivez had not seen, had not thought of me at all, but was suddenly charmed by the prospect and the evening.

Her hand was on the mane, and with one bound she was in the saddle again, cantering away through the park, and the last flutter of her dark habit fading among the trees, as I heard the sound of approaching steps; and I know not what made me turn hastily from the window, and get absorbed in a book, which

happened to lie on a side table quite convenient. It was a collection of Heber's Hymns, and on the first blank page, at which it chanced to open, there was written, "To Miss Helen Forbes, from her affectionate friend and cousin, Melrose Morton." My astonishment was so great that I held the book in my hand, and was palpably reading the presentation, when Miss Forbes came up with her extended hand, sweet, melancholy smile, and kindly greeting. She must have seen the surprise in my face, and I was too curious to postpone the inquiry.

"I have taken the liberty to look at your book, Miss Forbes."

"Oh, you are quite welcome."

"Beautiful Hymns those of Heber. But I see they have been given you by a Baltimore friend of mine, Melrose Morton."

"Did you really know him in America? How singular!" she said.

"Yes, I knew him well. Our acquaintance is of more than sixteen years' standing. I should have told you all about it, had I known he was a relation of yours."

"Oh, yes, he is my cousin, and was always kind to me. We used to be quite friendly when he was in papa's bank in Dublin; but"—there

was something at once sad and embarrassed in her look—"he and his mother would go to America, and they seem to have forgotten us since. I think there was some dispute between Melrose and papa ; but you will not speak of it, Mr. La Touche—it would vex him so, because Melrose left us just at the time poor mamma and my two brothers died."

Could that be the reason Morton had never spoken of the Forbes' as his cousins? Neither he nor the banker looked like implacable men : what could the nature of their dispute be? But it was proper for me to inquire further, and I could think of no change of subject but Madame Palivez.

"Oh, yes ; she passes our house often in the summer-time ; I think this is her first appearance ; she is coming out to her country house early," said Helen, in reply to my account of the fair equestrian.

"Does she live in the neighbourhood?" I was determined to get information.

"Yes, she has built a little villa, a gem of a house, quite foreign-like, at the west-end of the park—the most wonderful wild place you ever saw. She keeps a couple of old servants—I think they are both Greeks—there all the sum-

mer; rides down when she likes, quite alone, though there are grooms and footmen enough about her house in town, I hear; and shuts it up all the winter. Papa says the house is so simply furnished that bad people would find nothing to steal."

"That path seems a round about way to her villa."

"So it is, but she had it made for herself; it winds away beautifully through the old trees. I go to walk there sometimes in fine weather. There is no straighter one for her, except going down the road, and along the end of Norland Park. It is all parks and plantations here, you see; and that way would be just as long."

"I suppose Madame don't care for long ways—she has such a fine horse, and rides so well."

"Ay, she does ride beautifully; I never saw one look so free and easy in the saddle." How sincere she looked in the other lady's praise!

"And her horse is such a noble creature—knows her so well, and is so fond of her. Many a time, when I sit here at work in the summer afternoons, I see her coming home from her long rides. They say she goes away miles into the country, pausing to let it drink at the stream,

and stroking its neck just as you saw her; and the horse will turn from the water, rub its head against her, and stands so quiet till she bounds into the saddle. Is she not active and handsome? and papa says Madame is not young at all, but I can't believe it."

"She has been managing the bank so long," said I.

"For sixteen years, they say, since her father died, and nearly four when he was old and retired from business. Before that she was abroad, most of her time travelling in Russia and the East: I suppose it was there she learned to ride so well. Mr. Esthers says her relations are all in those quarters, and she leaves England every second year on long journeys in the same direction to see them, and the houses and agents the Palivez have in all the Eastern towns. Must not Madame be wonderfully clever and capable to manage it all, that great business, as papa says she does, though Mr. Esthers don't allow it? Yet I think there must be a good deal left to him when she is on her travels every second year, and so much in the fashionable world every season."

"In the fashionable world! I thought she lived very retired?"

“I believe she does, in Old Broad-street, quite in the Eastern style. Papa says they lived the same way in Dublin. But Madame has a fine furnished house in Curzon-street, Mayfair, where she receives company, and goes to balls and parties all the season. I am told all the great people of the west-end are her acquaintances ; and she is very intimate at the Russian Embassy. Perhaps it is, as Solomon tells us, ‘that the rich have many friends.’ She keeps a box at the opera, too, and one in each of the best theatres ; in short, she sees a deal of gaiety in the season, but always leaves town early ; then her house in Curzon-street is shut up. She lives mostly at her villa in the Park. Nobody is ever asked there, and her fashionable friends know nothing about it. Now I know what you are thinking of,” continued Helen, with a smile of quiet archness—“woman’s curiosity ; and how could I find out so much about a stranger?”

“No, indeed, Miss Forbes ; I was thinking no such thing. It is natural you should know a good deal. Your father has been long acquainted with the Palivez, and Madame is a very”—I paused to find the proper word.

“Very interesting, very remarkable person,” said Helen, helping me out. “Of course I don’t

know her. We never met ; never were introduced. But seeing her and her horse pass here so often when I sit at work, having little to occupy my attention, perhaps, and hearing so much of her from papa and Mr. Esthers when he happens to call, I must confess to a good deal of interest in Madame and her ways."

"Mr. Esthers could tell you most about them, I suppose? He ought to have the fullest information, being so long in the bank, and in such a confidential position, though I never found him willing to give any ; he rather avoids speaking of Madame to me."

"That is strange ! For he is always talking of Madame, when he comes here !"

"Is Esthers any relation to her?"

"Papa thinks he is ; but how near or distant nobody knows. He came into the bank very young, in her uncle's lifetime, when her father was only the younger brother there, and she was abroad on her travels."

"Miss Forbes, do you know if it be true that the Palivez always send their daughters to some part of Southern Russia, where they come from, and go there to get married?"

"I believe it is true. And there is another strange thing which you must have heard about

them. None of them ever lived to be old ; they all die somewhere about middle age. I have heard Mr. Esthers say so ; everybody says it, and he sometimes hints that Madame's life cannot be long now. Papa says her death would be no grief to him. He certainly did not look grieved when he said it ; and we think, from some other hints he dropped, that Mr. Esthers must be next heir, for Madame allows herself to be the last of the Palivez."

"Esthers will be very rich then, and thought a great catch, I'll warrant."

"No doubt he will," said Helen ; "but"—

"But what, Miss Forbes?"

We were on terms familiar enough for small jesting ; but I was surprised to see the swift, bright blush which mantled over her usually pallid face, as she said—

"Perhaps it is not right to think or say, but I never liked Mr. Esthers, though he has been friendly to papa in many ways, and rather seeks our acquaintance. I don't know why ; but there is something keen and watchful in his look, as if he were taking notes of everything, and he has such a habit of seeing people's faults and mischances in the very worst light. I think he would make anybody discontented, if they

listened to him long enough. I never knew him to come here without telling me what a lonely place it was. Do you think it so very lonely?"

"It is rather retired. But, as you told me when I first came here, it must be very pleasant in the summer time."

"Oh! very," said Helen, "when all the trees are full of leaves; when the wood-lark sings among them all day, and the nightingale all night, one forgets the dreariness of winter then. I'll allow the winter is dreary, so far from London; but papa likes a quiet place, and I like whatever pleases him."

"That is very good of you!"

"No, it is only my duty; besides, retirement is, perhaps the best thing for us."

The bright blush had faded away, and the face regained its pale soberness by this time.

"One is more apt to think seriously when out of the noise and bustle of the busy world. Yet, when I was younger, I used to wish sometimes that papa had not taken the loss of my poor mamma and brother quite so much to heart, or chose to lead such a solitary and very quiet life. He never cared for company or going out anywhere since then, though before it he was cheerful and social.

“ I can remember him myself, though I was but a child, and everybody says he is such an altered man.

“ Many a time I have tried to cheer him up, but could never well succeed, that sorrow weighs so heavy on him ; yet my father does not repine at the dispensations of Providence. I know his Christian faith and knowledge are above that ; but it may be I cannot understand the greatness of his loss, being so young at the time.

“ At any rate, my duty is clear—to be as much of a comfort to him as I can ; and there never was a kinder, more considerate, or indulgent father. “ Here he comes,” she continued, with evident pleasure, catching sight of an approaching figure, which I would not have known to be Mr. Forbes at that distance—“ and you will be good enough not to speak to him about Melrose Morton, it always vexes him. You won’t talk of me feeling the place lonely either, Mr. La Touche ; in fact I don’t now, one gets used to the like, and that would vex him, too. You won’t talk about it ?”

“ Not a word,” said I, as Mr. Forbes knocked at the door.

He seemed pleased to find me sitting there

with Helen, and looked in better spirits than usual.

The quiet evening passed in more than common cheerfulness. Helen sang and played two or three Scotch songs for us. Her voice was sweet and flexible, though of little power or compass. Her playing seemed fine to me, and I did gentleman's duty by standing behind her chair and turning the leaves of the music-book. We were all pleased with each other's company, and at the accustomed hour I took my way home, thinking, and not unpleasantly, of Helen Forbes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ANCESTRAL SIGNET RING.

IT was not late. The Forbes were early people, particularly on Saturday night. The Scotch Church they attended was a long way off, and required early rising on Sunday. The night was soft and clear, as the evening had been, and the moon, a little past the full, was shining gloriously on park and pasture-land.

I turned my gaze instinctively up that woodland path by which Madame Palivez had galloped home to her villa. We had talked no more of her in the course of the evening.

Helen's Scotch songs were still humming through my brain; but the flutter of the green habit disappearing through the trees was there too. I wondered how her villa

looked ; how she passed her time in it ; what a strange life she led between the business and Eastern state of Old Broad-street, the fashion and gaiety of Mayfair in the season, and the summer solitude of her hermitage at the end of Kensington Park, where nobody was ever invited, and a couple of old Greek servants kept.

What strange traditions hung about her family—known to men of business, and believed in banks and counting-houses—their daughters exported, their wives found in the far north, where offshoots of Greece were planted in the lands of the Tartar ; their princely descent—I could believe in that from her looks—their deaths at middle age—and she was the last of the Palivez ; but Madame could not be of middle age yet. They said she had managed the bank for twenty years, and been long abroad before it ; there must be some mistake—she did not look so old.

I looked up the path again ; the thick green grass and the glancing stream were clearly seen by the moonlight ; the whole scene was wild and silent as the untrodden wilderness, yet no spot ever looked so lovely

to me; in the deep stillness I could catch the murmur of the stream—I could see it like a thread of silver winding down the grassy path; and to this hour I know not what impulse sent me up the slope to pause beside it at the very spot where I had seen the horse drink and the lady in the green habit stroking its neck. She always let it drink there; Helen saw her from the window where she sat at work in summer afternoons. Had Madame seen me at that same window? I saw her look in that direction. It seemed out of range now; but moonlight was not like day, and the position was a commanding one.

Yet, what was it to me if the lady of the bank—the last of the Palivez, and my employer—could see the window of Notting Hill House, and one of her clerks an humble friend of the family? I ought to be at home; but there were not many inducements there, and the night was lovely. What is there in the silvery silence of moonlight to charm away from us the worst of our cares, and bring back the best of our memories? I had walked with Rosanna in such nights in Baltimore—was she thinking of me now?—but

no moon could be shining there, it was daylight still, and the longitude did not make all the difference. Rosanna was not the woman to have moonlight dreams, and I knew it; but the girl was beautiful, and she loved me.

Did Madame Palivez look out upon that moon from her woodland villa? was it far off? Nonsense: I ought to be at home; another look at the stream—and what was that glancing among the wild primroses that crept down to its waters? A ring—a broad hoop of beaten gold, with an amethyst set in it, larger than common ring-stones, and engraved with the head of Jupiter. At that very spot she had pulled off her glove and stroked the horse; the ring belonged to Madame Palivez—I had no doubt of that; there were Greek characters inside which I could not read; but the ring was hers, and should be properly returned.

I went home with it in my waistcoat pocket. I showed it to Rhoda—heard her admiration of it. How large and beautiful the purple stone was with that man's face on it! How broad the hoop was, with those queer scores inside! and how small

the lady's fingers must be—it would go on none of hers farther than the tip! I wrapped the ring up in paper, slept with it under my pillow, looked at it the first thing in the morning, and took it with me to the bank, determined that Esthers should hear nothing about it till I had the honour of delivering her lost jewel into Madame's own hands.

“Lucien,” said Rhoda, as she set my breakfast, “I dreamt about that great lady all night—that she was coming to our door in her carriage and taking you with her; but, somehow, it didn't seem to be for any good; however, dreams go by contraries, and I'll warrant she'll do something for you on account of finding her ring.”

I did not expect to be done something for; the service was a small one, and only an honest clerk's duty; yet I went with some exultation of heart, and in better than everyday trim, to the private entrance which I had been happy to get out of not three months before. The porter was there, as silent and stately as ever. I handed him my card, and made my request to see Madame Palivez. He rang the bell; the Eastern-looking servant appeared, and

informed me, in his measured words and foreign accent, that Madame was not at home; but he was the groom of her chamber, and would take charge of any message. There was no alternative but to place the ring in his hands, stating where I had found it, my belief that it belonged to Madame Palivez, and my wish that she would have the goodness to let me know whether or not I was correct in my opinion.

“The signor is perfectly correct,” said her groom, contemplating the ring with reverence enough for a relic; “this is my lady’s ring, the signet of the Palivezi, made by a Byzantine artist and astrologer for Prince Eusibius before the family went northward and settled in Russia; it is one of the choicest jewels of her house. Madame will give the signor great thanks for restoring it.”

I expressed my happiness at being able to serve Madame Palivez, mentioned particularly where I had found it, got more Eastern bows than I had ever been treated to before, and went to my work with a considerable feeling of disappointment.

The day passed, so did many more, and I heard nothing of the ring or its fair owner.

Madame Palivez was apparently satisfied with getting back one of the choicest jewels of her house, and thought any notice of the poor clerk who had found and restored it superfluous. It was true I had only done my duty, yet she might have acknowledged it by a civil message; never mind, I could live without her thanks; perhaps these were the manners of great ladies in the East. Such had been my reflections evening after evening as I went home; the non-notice vexed me more than I confessed to myself, much less to Rhoda, who came, poor girl, with expectation in her eyes, to meet me on my first homecoming after the ring had been delivered. I told her all that had occurred between me and Madame's servant; my heart drew to that only sister in its difficulties, despite our long separation and far different schooling. "Great people have ways of their own," said she; "I'll warrant Madame will mind it some time; and if she don't, you acted the gentleman, as you always do, I am sure."

It might have been about a fortnight after, I was walking home along the Bayswater-road—how quiet and rural it was then!—wondering why the last packet had not brought me a letter from Rosanna: I had made a resolution to think

no more of the ring, when the clatter of a horse's hoofs behind, and the sound of my own name, made me turn, and there was Madame Palivez, in her green habit, mounted on the beautiful Arabian. "Stop, Zara," she said, lightly tapping the sagacious creature with her gloved hand, for Madame carried no whip. The horse stood still as marble, and she continued to me, as I bowed, and positively felt myself blushing—"Good morning, Mr. La Touche. I have been puzzled for some days how best to thank you for finding my signet-ring."

"No thanks are requisite or expected, I assure you, Madame."

"Ay, but there should be; where did you find it?"—how anxious she looked on that point. "Among the wild primroses beside the stream," she said, as if repeating part of my account to herself, by way of making sure that she heard correctly. "How did you know the ring to be mine? I never wore it in your seeing."

"I supposed it to be yours, Madame"—my spirit was getting up under the cross-examination—"because I saw you dismount at that spot, and take off your glove, while your horse drank at the stream, from one of the windows of

Notting Hill House, where I happened to be spending the evening."

"You visit the Forbes' then? very good people, but rather dull, are they not?"

"Excellent people, Madame." She was going to say something else about them, but paused suddenly, and added—

"You made a correct guess regarding the ring; it must have fallen from my finger then, though it seems to fit well. There are none of all my family possessions I value more."

"It is a beautiful ring, Madame, and an ancient one, I presume; your servant told me it had been made by a Byzantine artist, before your family settled in Russia."

"Ay, yes, Calixi knows its history; it has been our signet for nine generations—a beautiful seal;" she had taken off her glove by this time, after first glancing along the road, as if to see that we were alone, and now the golden circlet and the engraved amethyst shone in the evening light, and on a hand whose symmetrical beauty and marble whiteness had no grace to borrow from gold or gems. It might have served for Homer's Venus, when she drew sword with such ill fortune against Minerva.

“Beautiful!” said I, meaning both the hand and the amethyst.

“The head of Jupiter, the god of the old world, the dispenser of greatness and good fortune still to those that read the stars,” she said, looking at the ring, and not at me.

“Your servant mentioned that the artist who made it was also an astrologer.”

“He was one of the most able professors of that immortal science in his day, and there was then some learning in the world. He made this ring according to hour and sign—the influence of the planet and the gem are united in it for the Palivezi; they have kept the signet and prospered in spite of their evil stars, which rule, nevertheless;” how seriously earnest and believing she looked!

“You have faith in astrology, then, Madame?” said I.

“Yes, I cannot disbelieve what I know to be true; but I forgot, for the moment, that you knew nothing of the science and had been taught to call it superstition.”

“That is the general opinion in our day,” said I; “but for my own part, I could never venture to say where truth ends and superstition begins.”

“ You speak wisely : their frontiers are more difficult to trace out than those of Sweden and Norway, which have lately given the commissioners so much trouble ; and there are neither landmarks nor witness-stones set up for us : have you read the motto inside the ring ? ”

“ I have not the good fortune to be a Greek scholar, Madame. ”

“ Well, you can be a very good clerk without Greek, and, what is better, a wise man, if that be in you ; language is but the channel of thought, and, as far as I know, anyone will serve the purpose as well as another ; but Greek was the language of my ancestors, they spoke it at Marathon and Salamis—for we are of Athenian, and not Spartan race : the motto means, in English, ‘ Suffer and reign. ’ ”

“ It is a singular motto. ”

“ It is a true one, my friend ; there is no ruling without suffering to ; but I have talked enough about my signet, ” and she drew on her glove. “ You saved it from the hands of some strolling gipsey or prowling boy, and thus served the fortunes of the Palivezi. Is there any way in which I can reward you ? ”

“ I wish for no reward, Madame ; ” she had encouraged me to converse as an equal, and now

the great lady was recollecting that I was but her clerk.

“ But I wish to acknowledge the service : think again, is there nothing in my power that would suit you ? ”

It was doubtless pride and folly that made me answer, “ Nothing, Madame,” and doubtless the motive powers were visible, for she responded, “ Something may occur to you in a future day ; in the meantime, accept a thousand thanks ; good evening ! ” and tapping her intelligent horse to proceed, Madame Palivez galloped away. I remember watching her till she was out of sight, but the great lady never looked back. I remember going home with a confused crowd of thoughts in my mind ; a determination to tell Rhoda nothing of the interview, because there was nothing said that she could understand, except my refusal to be rewarded, which would not have met with family approbation. Yet I could have done nothing else were the whole scene to be gone through again ; and for weeks after, all that had been said to me regarding the ring, the astrologer, and the fortunes of the Palivez, was coming back word for word, with the looks, tones, and the presence of the speaker ; but I went home, I went to work, and saw nothing of Madame.

CHAPTER XIV.

INSIDE A THREE PAIR BACK.

WHAT had become of Rosanna? and why had I no letter from her? These were the questions that troubled me as weeks wore away, and packet after packet came in. I had written three times, but got no answer. Could my good advice have been ill taken? It was kindly given, and I had been accustomed to advise her. Had any mischance happened? Sally would have been sure to write; she was more than commonly ready to communicate bad news. I grew anxious; I grew half jealous, though it was not my nature. Had the old gentleman who gazed from over the way any hand in it? I would wait one week longer, and then write under cover to Jeremy, and demand an explanation.

About the middle of the said week I was

hurrying into the bank with a strong impression of being rather late, when a dirty boy ran up to me, and said, "Please, sir, where am I to find Mr. La Touche?"

There was a large note in his hand, on which I caught sight of my own name in a handwriting which, if not the most beautiful, was then the most welcome in the world to me, for it was Rosanna's.

"I am Mr. La Touche," said I, plucking the note from his fingers, and leaving him astonished over a sixpence.

There was greater astonishment for me in the communication, which I read before I reached the office.

"Dearest and most beloved Lucien,
"This is to let you know that we have all arrived safe, and got lodgings as directed above. Sally would not stay any longer in Ameriky, and made Jeremy and me come home with her. We were mercifully presarved, but very long on say; and I am in the greatest of grief and trouble about you, not knowen what you will say, and also having got no letters from you. Dear Lucien, do not forsake your own Rosanna; but come and see me, or I will break my heart."

There was one woman that loved and valued me—that would not regard me only as a poor clerk to be paid for services and left unnoticed as the desk at which he sat. What if her letter were ill-spelled and worse indited? The bad spelling did not look so bad in the light by which I read it then. Yet their coming to London surprised me. It was doubtless Sally's doings. In spite of the fits which kept her so much within doors, there was a restless craving for change and excitement in her uncertain brain—a frequent concomitant of such uncertainty. But the quarter in which they had established themselves seemed still more unaccountable: it was No. 5, Bolton-row, Mayfair; and Rosanna had finished what she called the direction above with, "Please to ask for the three-pair back."

What brought them? What were they going to do in London, and what was I to do? Nothing but the duty before me. There was a household, in number nine, to be maintained. The idea of bringing home a young wife to Miss Livey was not to be contemplated, independant of the question of adequate means. Our engagement could not be fulfilled, but Rosanna and I could see each other; our mutual love and sympathy would give us both support under our

different trials, and, as Morton had said, how was our attachment to stand the wear and tear of life, if it could not outlast the years of probation? I thought of those matters and of her all day. I left as soon as business would permit, and made my way through a pouring wet evening to No. 5, Bolton-row. It was a back outskirt of what was at that time the head quarters of fashion; the spot which the Prince Regent delighted to honour with his presence at ball and party; the quarter into which all the leaders, dependencies, and offscouring of the fashionable world crowded in the season; where small houses were let at enormous rents, and back rooms yielded a revenue to those that let them.

Bolton-row was sacred to that class: its high narrow houses were filled to overflowing with the hangers-on of the *beau monde*; and when I knocked at No. 5, and asked for Miss Joyce, mentioning the three-pair back as directed, a slatternly maid pointed to the stair, lit by an ill-supplied lamp on the first landing; and through a din of ringing bells and loud talking from every room, through a steam of mingled coffee, dinners, and gin, I stumbled up three flights—narrow, steep, and sharp at the turns—to the

utmost attic, where I caught the well-known sound of Sally's voice in a high key of scolding, and by its help found a door in the darkness, knocked, and saw the first light fall on Rosanna's face as she opened it. With what a scream of delighted surprise the girl welcomed me! With what a flushed cheek and eye of dancing light she led me in with,

“Sally, Sally! here is Lucien!” The elder sister shrieked, and looked ready for a fit, and Jeremy, who had been probably the subject of her eloquence, rose out of his corner, and said, “Goodness me!” It was a low-roofed room, furnished in the make-shift manner of top rooms at the West-end: a ragged bit of carpet, in which one's feet got entangled; a crazy table, in danger of tilting up if things were not properly set in the centre; a few ancient and stuffy chairs, a sofa to match, and two half-curtained attic windows. I saw all that after I had seen Rosanna. She looked as pretty, as lively as ever, and had expected me, for her hair was in full flow of curls, and she had a new dress on.

Sally looked more disturbed in her mind than I had been accustomed to see her in Baltimore—things were not in the settling line with her;

but she had been scolding, and was taken by surprise. There was no change in Jeremy—time or travel could make none of his subjugated soul; but the brother and sister welcomed me with evident gladness. I heard all about their voyage, which had been a long one, and taken soon after my advising letter came to hand. Sally was clear on it that she must have died if they remained in America; the climate was entirely against her, and Jeremy was sure of a situation in London. I hinted that situations were not to be found at every step, but perhaps they had some prospect.

“Oh, yes; a good prospect—a very sure prospect,” said Sally, with great authority.

“Is it in this neighbourhood?” I was determined to know what brought them there.

“No, not exactly.”

“Because you will find it an expensive place to live in—these fashionable quarters always are: this top floor will cost you as much as very nice apartments in a quieter neighbourhood.”

“I can’t live in low corners; I never was brought up to it. Those two” (and Miss Joyce pointed at her brother and sister) “could do it

very well, I daresay. Their mother was a common person, but mine was a lady, Mr. La Touche, and I take after her. I must see life; I must have society."

To attempt reasoning with Sally on her prospects of seeing life, and having society in the three-pair back, was an undertaking beyond my courage, particularly as the lady could take fits. It was her whim to settle in an attic of Mayfair, just as it was to come home from Baltimore. Jeremy and Rosanna were mere counters in the game, in right of their mother being only a common person. There Sally was, and there she would stay till her brain took another turn; and I, seeing no promise of peace in it, waived the subject, asking Jeremy how he had left my uncle.

Mr. O'Neil was well, but there had been a report in Baltimore that he was going to get married; and Rosanna thought it must be true, for she had seen him at a door in the Virginia Villas, quite grand with his gold-headed cane and shoe-buckles. Somebody told her that the house belonged to Mrs. Maynard, a senator's widow, come of one of the first families in the town—a perfect madam. She had a son, a conceited young man, Rosanna thought; he

used to march along Baltimore-street as proud and high as if there was nobody good enough for him to look at. Jeremy added that he had been studying for the law, but changed his mind lately, and came to my uncle's counting-house, a sort of apprentice like, to learn the business, and Mr. O'Neil thought a deal of him.

There was the successor to my abandoned prospects, the man destined to occupy the place I had left vacant in my uncle's scheme. Well, I had chosen my lot and would abide by it; the pretty Rosanna sat by my side in the shabbiest of West-end attics, herself in a flush of delight, unconcerned about the shabbiness, and equally unconscious of the sacrifice thus forced on my attention. I would have done anything to protect her from that consciousness. It pressed heavily on my mind, now that I had additional responsibilities and no dependence but my own earnings, supplemented by the unrepayable friendship or charity of Mr. Forbes. It was perhaps an unnecessary effort to hide that root of bitterness, which made me say, with a gaiety I did not feel: "No doubt the old gentleman will marry the perfect madam, and adopt her son. Who can blame him? We would all marry, if we could."

“Every one can that wants to do it!” cried Sally, snatching at the words like an opportunity; “and I think it is quite time you and Rosanna should finish the business, now that you can keep a house.”

“There are too many mistresses in it already,” said I, hoping to foil the unexpected attack.

“Too many indeed, and of course it is all goodness in you; but what right have you, Mr. La Touche, to be saddled with such a tribe of women? I don’t speak against keeping your sister—a brother can never value a sister too highly” (and she looked admonishingly at Jeremy); “but a grand-aunt, and a strange woman’s daughter—dumb and mad, isn’t she?—I think some of your relations, or somebody, ought to keep them, and let you fulfil your engagement honourably.”

“I never meant to do otherwise, Miss Joyce, as you know very well; but my grand-aunt and poor widow Clark’s daughter I am bound to maintain by every feeling of honour and duty. I have no relations who could or would do it; I cannot leave them destitute; and I love Rosanna too well to bring her home to such a family.”

“Fiddlesticks!” cried my intended sister-in-law. “Do you think I would suffer you to put a ring on her finger till the house was clear of them? No! She’ll have a hard enough trial in married life, I’ll warrant—her that has been kept like a lady, without having an old woman’s tempers and a mad girl to deal with! But the business must be finished, I tell you, once for all. I’ll have no more hanging on or putting off. You have got a situation and a house, now is the time or never. If you are going to marry Rosanna, do it at once; and if you are not, say so, and let us understand one another.”

“Miss Joyce,” said I, “I wish above all things to marry your sister; it is the chief desire of my heart, the chief hope of my life, which I would do anything in conscience to fulfil; but I cannot, and I will not cast off my poor aunt and the dumb girl.”

My last words were drowned in a shriek of, “Oh, you deceiver!”

“Now, Sally, don’t,” cried Rosanna, and Jeremy echoed that remonstrance; but it was to no purpose. Sally continued to rail at me and mine for imposing on her family, beguiling her sister’s heart, with the worst intentions, and

making excuses to keep the girl from getting settled ; but she would show me that the Joyces were not to be made fools of. I had better not come there with my pretensions again.

She would lock Rosanna up if ever she spoke or wrote to me from that hour, and as I sprang to my feet, feeling the assault passed endurance, she uttered a sharper scream, and dropped on the floor in a fit. There was the usual fright and hurry getting her to bed, poor Rosanna and Jeremy all the while begging me not to mind what Sally said. It was just her way to work things up in that manner ; but she would come to herself by-and-bye.

I gave them what assistance I could ; went over the whole subject with the brother, when she was safely out of hearing, and the younger sister watching by her bedside in the adjoining room. Jeremy was sensible enough to see the difficulties of the case, and fully agreed in my views of duty ; but I knew that he must and would agree with Sally for all practical purposes, and it was with a weary, hopeless heart that I went down stairs, lighted by Rosanna, who took that opportunity to talk with me in private. If my own part of the business was hard, it was nothing to hers, shut up with and under the

dominion of that unresting, excitable, despotic sister, with her resolute whims and ever-recurring fits. My poor girl wept sore, leaning on my shoulder at the top of the steep stair, telling me there was no peace, with Sally always going on about my being in no haste to marry her, and meaning nothing but deceit and villany.

“She says there are plenty of better men I might have, now that your uncle is going to marry, and won't do anything for you; and I am sure I don't know what she means; but you won't forsake me—you won't break my heart, Lucien!”

I do not remember half of all I said to comfort Rosanna. My own heart was sore and heavily laden; there seemed no outlet from the necessities that hampered us; the troubles that warped and wore away our lives; and what seemed worse than all, though it lay unuttered in my mind, was a misgiving that our marriage would not bring us happiness, even if the way were clear. I had never felt so before, and I tried to fling off the feeling, for there seemed no reason in it. Sally Joyce was no worse prospect for a sister-in-law than she had ever been; perhaps her whims and fits were on the increase, and the present state of things had given her a

mighty opportunity to be troublesome. Jeremy was no more under her government than usual. It was his destiny, and he fulfilled it, poor fellow. Rosanna was as fair, as fond as ever, and my vows and protestations of truth to her were repeated in all honesty. Her face was clothed with smiles again, when Sally began to moan in the inner room, and I knew it was unfitting to stand longer on the stair; yet, when I got into the street and felt the cool air upon my brow, it was a positive relief to get away from all the Joyces.

I walked quickly out of the Row, taking no heed of my direction, and never pausing or looking about till I found myself in the middle of Curzon-street. The rain was over, and had left the air full of freshness and the sky full of stars, for it was night by this time—such night as still comes to Mayfair in the height of the London season, with the flare of lamps, the roll of carriages, the thunder of knockers, and the sight of ladies in full dress. Curzon-street seemed particularly occupied with something of the kind, and I perceived that the chief attraction to its discerning public was a mansion on the opposite side, lighted up from basement to attic, as

if for a grand gala; a double line of carriages in front, which every minute increased with new arrivals; a confused mingling of liveries and flowers half seen through its open door, as the full-dressed ladies and gentlemen swept in; and a much greater confusion of commands, remonstrances, and remarks, between the attendant lacqueys, the order-keeping police, and the crowd of link-boys and lookers-on.

I paused, for there was no passing till the fuss subsided. I had no interest in the Countess of This, or the Marchioness of That, on whom the crowd were making their remarks, loud enough, though not always complimentary, as the great people descended and disappeared; yet the mansion before me, blazing with festal splendour, and getting so full of company, caught my mind away from its private troubles, for in a servant who passed me, made his way through the crowd, and got in at the open door, I recognised, in spite of his rich livery, the grave, silent man in Eastern costume who had ushered me into the presence of Madame Palivez.

“Can you tell me to whom that house belongs, sir?” I said, addressing a gentleman who stood beside me among the more respect-

able portion of the gathering on the pavement, watching the arrivals, perhaps waiting to pass, but evidently in no great hurry, for he stood tapping the flags with his rattan, and humming a theatrical air to himself.

“It belongs to the great banking lady, as I suppose one may call her, Madame Palivez. She owns the Greek Bank in Old Broadstreet; sole owner, and director, too, I understand. They say there is no end of her riches, and she is giving a ball to-night, you see, in honour of the Russian Ambassador and that old Princess who has come to visit him.”

“Princess Lieven,” said I, having learned so much of the great world from the newspapers.

“Yes, that’s her name. A regular old witch to look at. If you had come five minutes sooner you might have seen her get out of the carriage. Not much of a sight for one to miss, though. Do you think it is true that she had a hand in taking off the Russian Emperor’s father?”

“It is hard to know what may be true about court ladies,” said I. “Is Madame Palivez supposed to be a friend of the Princess?”

“ Oh! bless you, yes. She knows all that sort of people. The family came from Russia, I understand, though they are of Greek origin; but Madame is hand-and-glove with all the swells—fashionables, I mean—at home and abroad. Money, you perceive, answereth all things;” and the gentleman did something between a sigh and a swagger, which indicated to me that the article in question was not plentiful with him.

His appearance had caught my fancy and made me address the man, for my American breeding gave English manners a cold and repelling effect, and I found myself yet a stranger in the land. He was some inches less than myself, but substantially built, with a fair allowance of bone and muscle. He was some years older, too. His complexion might have been fair, but was bronzed with weather and travel; his hair was decidedly auburn, just escaping the red; his bushy whiskers had not come within the saving clause. The upper half of his face (that is to say, forehead and eyes) was handsome and expressive, but the lower was coarse and heavy. On the whole, there was more of breadth and massiveness than beauty. His dress was what young men

about town called swellish—rings, pins, and chains beyond the common in flash and quantity, but carelessly thrown on, with a wrinkled cravat, and shirt-front out of order. He was no dandy, but he liked finery and looked a gentleman in spite of it, though to what order, calling, or profession he might belong it were hard to guess.

There was a look of idleness, of being without occupation, and not knowing what to do with himself, about the man; there was also an appearance of not being particular where he went or what he did; yet withal, such an expression of honest, simple frankness, resolute courage, and boundless good-nature in his face, that I felt drawn to him on first sight. He was the man one could have had good fellowship with in social evenings, good help from in desperate circumstances; not the best of advisers, not the safest of companions, perhaps, yet far more ready to go than lead astray; and at worst, given only to play in the puddles or slip into the mires of life, never to dig its pitfalls, or spring its mines for others.

He stood there by my side, talking in an easy, friendly fashion, as if glad to find some

one he could talk and linger with, making off-hand strictures on such of the magnificent company as we could see getting out of their carriages; and when at length the arrivals ceased and the crowd began to give way, we parted with a civil "good evening," and I saw him take the very direction by which I had come, and walk straight into Bolton-row.

It was time to go home, and home I went, but slowly, and with many a backward look at the lighted-up house, and the crowd of carriages in front of it. That was Madame Palivez' West-end mansion, where she was at home and went out in the season. What wealth it must require to support such an establishment, to give such expensive entertainments! and how would the mere outlay of that evening, the mere equipments of one carriage full, jewellers' work considered, break down the barrier between Rosanna and me, and bring us happily to commence housekeeping together! The unequal division of things never pressed so heavily on my mind before. And then what riches must be at the disposal, in the command of that one solitary woman, without heirs or relations, for everybody said Madame was the last of the Palivez.

Why did she live unmarried? It was not for want of offers, with her wealth and her beauty, I thought, getting out of Curzon-street by this time, on my way home. What made me turn back to get another look at the mansion? The carriages and the crowd had rather increased, with the coming of late but distinguished guests, I judged by the bustle they made; and when elbowing nearer to get a better sight, somebody elbowed me a fierce, sharp thrust, as if the arm-bone had a dagger in it; and there leaning against a lamp-post, shoving everybody off, but looking only at the festal mansion, I saw Mr. Esthers.

He did not observe me; perhaps did not mean to observe. His mind was preoccupied, and with no pleasant thoughts, for a stranger who saw the sharp-eyed little man gazing at his employer's house would have been puzzled to say whether he was taking notes to report in some hostile and malicious newspaper, or making vituperative observations on the waste of his own patrimony. I looked at him in wonder; I looked at the house too. How did she look among that magnificent company? No doubt as queenly as I had seen her in those silent harem-like rooms of hers behind

the bank in Old Broad-street. How was she dressed? Was there any chance of her being seen at the lighted windows? What business was that of mine? I ought to be at home; and where was Esthers? He had slipped away through the crowd, as if towards Madame's house, but there I lost sight of him; and as I entered Bolton-row as the shortest way back to Oxford-street, there was a man knocking at No. 5, but the door had closed upon him before I reached it, and there was a bright, and, to me, a mysterious light in the attic.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ATTEMPTED MURDER.

I WALKED home through the cool starlight night, left the bustle and glare of the West-end behind me, and reached our own remote neighbourhood, then silent with country quiet, and sweet with the breath of green fields and blooming hawthorn. There was the little house—an honest and respectable, if not attractive home, and there was Rhoda at its door, looking anxiously out for her gentleman-brother, who happened to be later than usual.

She had a welcome for me as kindly, though it was not given with Rosanna's eyes; and when I got in, there was my grand-aunt, poor old Miss Livey, with her wrinkled face, slowly spinning in her accustomed corner, and Hannah Clark knitting quietly on a low stool by her side. The

old woman looked up and smiled as I entered, and the dumb girl sprang up with a joyful cry. They were all glad to see me—that simple helpless household missed me when I went out, and waited for my coming home. Yet I was lonely among them, and likely to be so; they formed a living rampart between me and Rosanna, and there was none whom I could take into confidence on that matter. I had not the heart to let even Rhoda know the cause of my late home-coming, for she, too, was involved; if it must be told some time, it could be postponed now, so I gave them to understand that business had detained me, made believe to eat my supper, and undertook to lock the outer door and make things generally safe, when they all retired to bed, and left me with candles and papers by way of excuse for remaining up in our little sitting-room. I had risen early, and been at work all day, but the scenes of the evening had banished sleep from my eyes, and there were restless thoughts, that seemed to have no connection, jostling each other in my mind.

Rosanna, her unlucky life, her termagant sister, my solemn engagement, it was taking the shape of a bond; yet did I not love the girl

who had so long loved and trusted me? Then my poor relations, the impossibility of ever providing for them and being able to marry. I could take counsel of nobody who would approve such a wedding: not Wilson nor Mr. Forbes, they were all the friends I had, and might help me in spite of disapprobation; but I wanted no more charity. Over and over the subject was turned, and ever through these home troubles of my humble life came the lighted mansion in Curzon-street, with the crowd, the carriages, and the gay company sweeping in. Through the deep silence of the sleeping house and the country neighbourhood I could hear in fancy the sound of music and dancing from that distant ball.

The light and splendour of those brilliant rooms which I had never entered flitted before my eyes—the forms, the dresses, and, chief of all, the lady of the festival; how did she look, how did she dance? and what was all that to me? I could not go to bed; I couldn't read; I could not fix on any course of conduct; I could not write to Melrose Morton, though each expedient was tried in turn as the hours wore away and my candle burned down. It would soon go out, but the grey light of the morning

was creeping in through my window-shutters. I opened them and looked out: there was the summer daylight stealing over the sky in its early whiteness, the stars were going down behind woods and hills, and there was a rising flush in the east right over London.

The last of the carriages would have driven away by this time; Madame Palivez would have turned out of her deserted ball-room, and cast off dress and jewels, weary enough, no doubt, and glad to go to sleep. Was that the lark I heard waking up among the meadows? There was no use in me going to sleep now, I felt strangely wakeful and active; and there came, I never could say whence or why, a sudden impulse to go out; and out I went, unbarring the door and closing it behind me as securely and quietly as possible.

The morning air was fresh and cooling; I walked on through the growing light and dewy fragrance, heard the lark singing far above, envied his free life, unburdened with thought or care, custom or duty, as many a man has done. He had his love and home without fear of inadequate provision, engagements or obligations, and I had a sister, a grand-aunt, and Hannah Clark, not to speak of Jeremy and Sally Joyce,

in prospect, if the connexion could ever become possible.

I passed the Notting Hill turnpike, and through the village street, where the earliest labourer was not yet stirring. I saw Mr. Forbes' house lying grey and silent among its grounds; I looked up the hill-side path among the trees where the lady had alighted and the horse had drunk at the stream. I had found the signet-ring there which kept good fortune in her family; strange notion, and strange that I should find it! My steps had turned in the direction as if by instinct; I was going up to the very spot; but what sounds were those far up the winding path—growls, scuffling, the tramp of a horse's hoofs, and at last a human voice? It was a man saying in a hoarse screech, "You murdered him! I know you did, and I'll finish you, you sorceress."

I rushed to the spot from whence the voice proceeded, and there on the steepest part of the hill, where the path was narrowest and the trees grew thickest, was Madame Palivez, green habit and all, mounted on her Arab horse, and urging the noble creature with all her might to strain away from a man who had caught by the bridle, which had partly given way in his grasp, and

was lunging at her with a long, sharp knife. Another thrust, and he must have reached her; but I was upon him before he was aware, seized his uplifted arm, wrenched the knife out of his hand, flung it far into the thicket, and hurled him backwards to the ground, rending the bridle-rein at the same moment, and setting the Arab free. Away it bounded like an arrow, but I heard Madame cry, "Stop, Zara!" and she was again by my side, while I tried to hold the man down. He was a wild, fierce creature, with ragged clothes, tangled hair, and eyes full of the fire of madness, but worn to skin and bone, and not my match in strength. Yet it was a desperate struggle for some minutes: he gnashed his teeth, tried to tear me with his long nails, and struck out with his heels like a vicious horse. "For Heaven's sake keep off, Madame!" I cried, as she approached. Her face was deadly pale, yet there was more of resolution than fear in it.

"Hold him, if you can," she said, and then up went a small silver bugle to her lips, and a long shrill blast made the park about us ring; the next moment I heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and two mounted grooms came galloping up the hill. She made a sign to one of them—

it was the silent servant Calixi—they both sprung from their horses, seized on the man, whom I had almost mastered, while he continued to gnash his teeth, and cry—“You murdered him! I know you did, you sorceress.”

“Leave him to them,” she said, motioning me away. “You have saved my life; do me one other service; go home and speak nothing of this adventure to anyone till we meet again.”

“I will obey you to the letter, Madame; but may I not see you safe to your villa?”

“No, no,” she said, impatiently, “there is no danger now; go home and do not speak of it—I request—I entreat you!”

And with some words—I think they were Greek—to the silent servant, she rode rapidly away.

They had got the man bound with some of their horse gear, and silenced too, by this time; it was done so quietly and quickly I could not tell how. He was manifestly mad; yet that silent servant had some mode of subduing his fierceness. I had heard him whisper something in a foreign tongue as they were binding the man, whom they had got up now, and Calixi was marching him away; I should like to have known where, but he motioned me to go, exactly

as Madame had done, and being bound by promise, I left, and soon lost sight of them among the trees. If anybody had heard the shrill blast of that silver bugle, except those for whom it was intended, they had all gone to sleep again; the road, the village, all lay silent in the early morning light; nobody at home seemed to have been disturbed by my going out or coming in, and weary, bewildered, and with some bloody scratches on my face and hands, I crept up to my own bed-room to prevent wonder or observation, just as the house-clock struck four.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SECRET MEETING.

THANKFUL to God for having been preserved, and for being able to serve my benefactress, I had slept in spite of the daylight and the strange adventure, for nature was worn out—slept too deeply for dream or consciousness of life, till somebody called me by name. It was Rhoda at my room-door, with “Lucien, dear, it’s half-past eight, and I came to call you, for fear of your being too late for the bank.” “Thank you, Rhoda; I will be ready in five minutes.” Ready I was, but the glass showed me grievous evidences of that fierce struggle on the hill-side path; the marks of the wild creature’s claws were in my face like those of a mountain cat. I covered them as well as I could with court-plaster which happened to be by me, and I made a point of

telling them at breakfast that I had cut myself accidentally with my razor.

“ Goodness be about us ! but you must have done it in style,” said Miss Livey, surveying my plastered countenance ; “ that shaving is a dangerous business, Lucien ; you ought to take better care.”

“ Aunt, dear, maybe he couldn’t,” said Rhoda ; “ at any rate, the cuts will soon get well, as every cut does with him. Don’t you mind when we were all at home in Armagh, he nearly took his thumb off whitling sticks with the carving-knife, and it was well in no time ?”

“ Ay, that was the summer before Raymond went off. How he nursed and comforted the child ! Who would have thought he could ever have done as he did !” Miss Livey would have gone on with reflections on that subject ; she was terribly given to turn to it in those latter years of hers ; but Rhoda let the house-keys fall—it was one among many expedients the good girl had for stopping her ; the reproof and the defence upon it got over the rest of the breakfast time, and then my untroubled sister saw me out at the door, with the assurance that nobody could help cutting themselves, and she knew my face would soon be well.

The girl had sense enough to keep the secret ; but I had promised not to tell it, though it was filling all my thoughts. I hoped the bank people would believe something about the razor, but as everybody kept their distance there, no remarks were made, and Esthers was not in the office. By a city man's wanting to see him about an hour after, I found out that he was not in the house, and the forenoon passed without his appearance. Such absence was very unusual with the manager. I noticed, but did not regret it ; there was more leisure to speculate on the event of the early morning, which had submerged in my mind all that passed before it. Would Esthers be made acquainted with it, or was the secret to be kept from him too ? Why was it kept at all ?—and who could that emaciated maniac be ? What were his mad motives for attacking Madame at such a place and time ? I recalled his features, they were stamped on my memory ; his evident insanity—his strange expressions—“ You murdered him ! I know you did, you sorceress.” That was but the raving of madness. Nobody believed in sorcery now ; and murder—that fine figure, classic face, and alabaster hand, all telling of refined, luxurious life, had nothing to do with crime—it was

clearly madness. Yet why did she utter no cry for help, and only sound the summons to her on-coming servants when his knife was gone and the maniac could do little harm? Why did she enjoin me not to speak of it, "till we meet again!"

Those words of hers kept ringing in my ears. When would that meeting be, and should I get a full explanation then? Come what would, I should try to get one. There was something in the man's voice and features known to my memory, but how or where they had been met with before I could not imagine. Would it all pass as the finding of her signet-ring had done? I was determined it should not, however unhandsome the forcing myself into her secret might appear. I had a concern, an interest in it, not possible to explain to myself. She said I had saved her life, and so I had, beyond a doubt. The great lady of the bank and of Mayfair owed me that obligation; it was but a lucky chance, a thing I ought to have done, yet my heart swelled with pride at the recollection; and poverty, my grand-aunt, and Sally Joyce, were forgotten.

Weary with turning over these puzzles, not over-occupied with my work, and actively sleep-

less all the preceding night, I had fallen into a doze with my head and hands leant on the desk in the quiet office, sensible only of the heat and hum of the surrounding city in the summer afternoon, when the door creaked and somebody slipt in. It was Esthers coming back with unusual silence. The manager was a common apparition, and I was not afraid to be caught dozing, yet the first look of his face made me spring to my feet with an uncontrollable impulse, for it explained one of my puzzles. There was the resemblance I had seen and could not understand in the man on the hill-side. It could not be; it was not the same face; the tangled hair, the wild eyes, the rags and emaciation made a difference, but my eye had taken in the likeness and could not get quit of it. Contrary to his general custom, Mr. Esthers made no remark on my confusion. Something seemed to occupy himself, and in no pleasant manner; he said good day civilly, sat down in his place, began to work on the bank books with great application; but I heard him sigh as he turned the pages—by-the-bye, he ground his teeth also, and muttered to himself “One’s own turn, perhaps.” Towards evening he got into his old way, chatted with me familiarly on matters of business, and gave me to understand

in an easy, off-hand manner, that he had been out all the morning on Madame's affairs.

There was no allusion to the ball in Curzon-street, at which I had seen him cast such malign looks—not the slightest to the tragical event that followed it, though every glance and movement reminded me of the man clutching the broken bridle and lunging with the long sharp knife. It was not he, yet it was like him, and Esthers could not be in the secret, or he would have known my part in it and made some ill-natured remark; the clerk that saved his superior lady's life would not have been a pleasing subject to our manager. Let me confess that I lingered on the road that warm bright evening in hopes of hearing the Arab's hoofs and seeing the green habit, as if that had been her rendezvous. I had no notion of her being frightened from it or anything else by her adventure on the hill-side path; there was a look of calm and resolute courage above that of most men mingling with her feminine beauty; but neither hoof nor habit came. I chid myself for losing time in such foolish expectations, and went home to get a good night's rest.

Next day was Saturday, when the bank

closed early. I was accustomed to go to Mr. Forbes, and Esthers and our Jewish clerks to the synagogue; they kept only the fag end of their own Sabbath, and played nine-pins most of the Christian Sunday. The bank was closed, and I was in the middle of Thread-needle-street looking for a coach to get home quickly and be dressed in time for dinner at Notting Hill House, when a voice behind said in my very ear,

“Madame Palivez will be glad to see the signor half an hour hence, if he will go to the Greek Coffee-house in Finsbury Pavement and wait till her messenger comes.”

“Happy to obey Madame’s commands,” said I, looking round at Calixi. He disappeared through the crowd, and I made my way to the old Greek Coffee-house.

There were only two or three Russians there, smoking and making some bargain. I sat down in the identical box where I had sat on Christmas-day, and heard Wilson telling my own sad family secret.

It was only Midsummer now, yet what events had thickened round my life since then! the last having far the firmest hold on my mind. It was little more than twenty minutes by the

clock, but it seemed hours to me till Calixi came to me. He came with the merest sign, and I rose and followed him out of the coffee-house, and across the Pavement, and into the labyrinth of small narrow streets which lay between the back of Madame's bank and Finsbury. They were more numerous and intricate in that direction at that period than at present; fires and improvements have done a good deal to alter the neighbourhood, and between them swept away an ancient Greek church and its cemetery which stood at the intersection of Winch and Blomfield-streets, so closely hemmed in by old houses that only a narrow and almost darkened passage between them and the church-wall gave entrance to the burying-ground. This was our way, one of whose existence I had never dreamt.

The houses were mostly stores belonging to Greeks, Jews, and Russians, who then kept their depots in that quarter; their back windows, which would have looked into the churchyard, were all shut, and seemed to have been so for years; it was overgrown with long grass, weeds, and nettles, as silent and shut out from the world as if it had been in the midst of a forest. Funerals could not have been frequent there, for there

were no new graves to be seen ; the church was ruinous, particularly in the rear, the green moss grew thick upon its walls, and sparrows flew out and in through its broken windows. Right opposite, and bounding the churchyard, there rose a wall high and massive enough to be the outwork of a castle ; as we approached it, I noticed a beaten path through the thick growing weeds, which led straight to a narrow door hung on stone lintels and bound with iron ; here my guide paused, inserted a small key in the lock, turned it without noise, and admitted me into one of the most beautiful conservatories I have ever seen.

It must have been a kind of courtyard originally, but was roofed with glass of all colours, through which the sunshine fell in broken and brilliant rainbows on the white marble floor, adorned with statues, fountains, and vases of porcelain, Bohemian glass, and alabaster, in which all manner of exotic plants, shrubs, and even orange trees were growing. I think the silent servant enjoyed my look of amazement—the transition from the old overgrown churchyard was so unexpected and surprising ; but with the same grave immoveable face he conducted me up a broad stair, steps and banister of white marble,

to an upper conservatory, and thence into the Eastern-like saloon where I had my first audience of Madame Palivez.

There she sat, not now in purple velvet, but a summer dress of fine India muslin striped with gold, made in a fashion which no milliner in Mayfair could have tolerated; I knew that, slight as was my acquaintance with ladies' ware. It was a classic robe, its folds gracefully fitted to her full but perfect figure, and bound round the waist with a broad purple sash. Her long abundant hair was more loosely braided for the summer time, and instead of the gold net and pins, she wore a wreath of the white japonica, which I think was natural.

"Good evening, my friend," she said, extending her white hand with the signet-ring on it, while the loose Greek sleeve showed me a beautifully rounded arm and filigree gold bracelets; "I may well call you so, after the service rendered me so lately. Do be seated," and she pointed to an opposite sofa.

I had come determined to get things explained, but the scene, the lady, somehow took me off my guard. I sat down, saying nothing, and feeling that I had nothing to say. But Madame had something, and went on—

“ You came most opportunely ; the unfortunate man certainly would have killed me ! He is insane, you are aware ; has been in a lunatic asylum for nearly seven years, and made his escape about the middle of last week. Our house, owing to special family arrangements, is charged with his guardianship ; hence his hatred to myself : it is a common effect of madness to make people hate all in authority over them, is it not ? ”

“ I believe it is, Madame ; and he is evidently mad. ”

“ Yes, it is the misfortune—the heirloom of his family,” she spoke slowly and with cold composure ; “ a solemn, silent, melancholy madness, subject to sudden fits of violence, and sure to sink into the lowest type of idiotcy. ”

“ A sad heirloom, indeed, Madame. ”

“ Yes, young man. Would all the wealth of London make you wish to belong to such a family ? ”

“ Certainly not,” it was from my heart ; “ but does the insanity descend to them all ? ”

“ All, to the utmost generation, root and branch, with little modification, except in the matter of time. ”

“ He is remarkably like Mr. Esthers,” said I, gathering up my resolution.

“He is,” said Madame, without the slightest emotion, and there was something in her eyes I could not question; “it is not possible to account for these resemblances. He has been restored to the asylum—a proper and humanely managed one—to my certain knowledge. Being insane, his attack on me is a matter to be passed over and forgotten, certainly not to be spoken of for the benefit of idle gossips, and the vexation of unfortunate relatives. There are few families that have not some serpent’s nest, as they in Asia; a skeleton in the closet, as Europeans say;” and she looked me keenly in the face.

My family history was known to that great lady, and I could only answer, “It is true.”

“For that reason, I requested you to keep silence on the subject, and now that we have met, I believe that I can depend on your discretion.”

“You may, Madame; if you think it advisable that the matter should not be spoken of, I am not the person who would or should make it public.”

“I believe you,” she said, “most sincerely; but tell me one thing—how did you happen to be so early abroad, and in such good time for me?”

“I could not sleep, Madame, and went out to get the air.”

“Not sleep at your time of life, my friend!—oh, but our sleep is broken early and often before we come to the long one. You walked a good way; it was a pleasant morning; I was riding alone to my villa, and had bidden the servants follow, not knowing he was out. It was strange that I could not find my bugle till you came up, and I would not blow till you took the knife; he might have attacked and killed some of them.”

“Better them than you, Madame.”

“No; they have relations, friends who would miss them, and nobody would miss me.”

“Madame, you cannot think so, with all your advantages and——”

“Wealth you mean.” It was beauty I had been going to say, but I added, “Yes, that is a great help to one’s being missed.”

“Oh no, my friend, it remains behind us; all it could buy—all it could bribe for us—honour, influence, fashion, luxury, they are left to go with it to others—to enemies; and we must go to the clay.”

She spoke in a dreary, hopeless tone that smote me to the heart. I had known the varied ills of

poverty ; was this the one great woe of riches, that people must die and leave them? They had told me that all the Palivez died at middle age ; yet it was only speaking my thoughts when I said, “ There is a long way between you and the clay yet, Madame.”

“ There is not—there cannot be ; young man, you do not know that there are evils which make us fly to it—evils which no wealth can bribe away, no success atone for—which cling to us and ours in spite of honour and fortune—black shadows cast over all our days, on all our sunny mornings and festive nights, coming on to meet us in palpable shape as we advance along the path of years, and no turning from them, but that which leads down to dust and darkness.”

Alas ! this woman—beautiful and fair—rich above almost all—learned, revered, beloved—had no other faith than this !

She was speaking slowly, calmly, but in such a tone as that in which the night wind wailing through ruins speaks to one’s fancy. Never were my senses so utterly confounded and set at variance as to hear that beautiful woman in her gay summer dress and rich surroundings, speak words of such mysterious and terrible import. There was something ghastly and spectral

in the contrast—it was the skeleton at the feast, and an indefinite fear came over me; something like the feeling with which I woke at night from dreams of my lost brother.

What black shadows could she mean? was the woman speaking of herself, of her own experience, or only of things which she had read or heard of—which her imagination dwelt on, in that isolated life she pleased to lead, its hours not all filled up with bank business or fashion? She sat there before me, wearing the same fixed look with which she had spoken so darkly; no agitation, no excitement in the beautiful intellectual face, but it had grown stony and statuesque, reminding me somehow of the sphinx, and gazing at me as if she expected an answer.

“I cannot understand you, Madame; there are evils in life which money cannot buy off, I know—bad health, personal afflictions, and the like; but what can you have to complain of—young, handsome, and happily situated as you are.”

“I am not young in the reckoning of one at your years; but we will speak of something more interesting,” she said, with sudden stateliness—the lady of the bank addressing her clerk once more; “you have done me a great and un-

common service ; it is my desire as well as my duty to reward, that is, to acknowledge it ; tell me in what way I can do so most useful or agreeable to you."

I had been thrown back for miles by the first queenly word and look. She had encouraged me to forget myself, and I had done it. Was it for that she had brought me there, and got into familiar talk ? The mistress of the bank should see that I had been born a gentleman, and was not to be rewarded or paid for service like her groom ; a free man also, not to be drawn out at her pleasure or sport, and sent back into his corner again, like one of the Eastern slaves to whom she was accustomed.

"Madame Palivez," said I, and the opposite mirror showed me that there was full-blown pride and suppressed anger in the look I gave her, straight in the face, "I expect and will receive no reward for what you are good enough to call my service. I did nothing on that occasion but what an honest man should have done for any lady, any person in like peril ; mere accident brought me to the spot, and I am glad that my early walk enabled me to be of some use to you."

I had risen at the conclusion of my speech,

determined to take leave at once, but she held out her hand, and said, with a look of arch familiarity altogether irresistible, "My dear fellow, you are a fool. Allow me to tell you, you will never get on in this world, without putting a proper value on your own performances, and getting profit out of them. Sit down there, and don't be in such a hurry to take fire when one only wants to acknowledge one's obligation; we rich people cannot allow ourselves to be in such debt without giving a testimonial—an I O U of some sort, you understand. Sit down; stay to dinner with me, like a good boy."

She positively directed me back to my seat with the extended hand which I had taken instinctively; what a firm clutch those fine taper fingers had! and I sat down, feeling that the world was made new between us; we were back on the old footing of intimacy, almost of friendship; it was another turn of her game, but I did not see the move.

I was engaged to dine with Mr. Forbes and his daughter; I knew they would expect me by this time. Helen would be sitting at work and looking out of the bay window, as I had seen her many a Saturday evening; her father would

be wondering, the dinner would be waiting ; but I forgot all that, and when she repeated, "Do stay to dinner," I merely answered, "Madame, I am not dressed." It was all that would come out from the tumult of my thoughts. "Never mind," said Madame, "I have seen people dine in all sorts of dresses, and yours seems as good as the most of them. We are not in Mayfair, thank Heaven, and need not be afraid of the butler and footman ; you can't be more fastidious than a lady, you know ; stay and dine with me ; I really cannot part with you this evening."

What answer but one of acceptance could be made to that ? I know not in what words mine was given, but I stayed. There was no more talk about the service or the reward—no further allusion to the black shadows. She was gay, friendly, and entertaining, showed me through her rooms—a handsome suite they were, all furnished in the same half-Oriental fashion, comparatively empty to an English eye : the low sofas, small tables, and richly-wrought cushions scattered here and there, would not have been thought sufficient to furnish a well-to-do tradesman's back parlour, as far as quantity went ; but everything was of the finest

workmanship and material; mirrors and hangings, pictures and statues were there, not numerous, but of rare excellence: and I remarked that all the objects of art were either antiques or by the old masters. They had been collected from far climes and ages; there were curtains worked in the old Byzantine looms, when silk was the monopoly of the Greek Empire, and bought for its weight in gold by Western princes; there were vases from Etruscan tombs, amber cups made in Novgorod, with the Palivez crest upon them, a broken crown, and the Greek motto graven on the inside of her ring, she said, "Suffer and reign." There were ornaments of malachite, opal, and gold from the Uralian mines, ivory images carved in Kamtschatka; and, chief of all, the marble gods and graces of the antique world. My connoisseurship was small, but I always knew the beautiful, and had never seen so much of it before. She showed me all, told me curious particulars of them, and their adventures; how they had come into her hands, what previous owners and travels they had; the times and countries to which the most ancient, or strange to me, belonged.

There was something remarkable or amusing

repeated about every one, except a picture which seemed to me somewhat out of place: it was a full-length portrait of a woman in an ancient and foreign costume, rich furs, and massive jewels, with a face of the decidedly Tartar type, undoubted Calmuck, a high stiff cap, made of gold plates and black fox-skins on her head, and a look of silent, solemn, concentrated anger. The picture was hung in a conspicuous place in Madame's largest and handsomest saloon; rich in art, and opening on the conservatory; close by it stood an antique statue, a draped figure, with a face of which one could hardly say that it belonged to boy or maiden: young it was, but sternly beautiful.

The one hand clutched a weapon, and the other a cup half concealed by its robe; the head was crowned with a garland of cypress and Madame said, "It is the Athenian Nemesis, taken from her temple when they made a Christian church of it, in the middle of the fourth century, and saved from destruction with much difficulty—for the new creed was most hostile to that goddess—by an ancestor of mine who lived and died a pagan, and left it, with other heir-looms, to our house." But she made no

remark on the picture, and I could not venture to inquire into its history.

We went to dinner in the conservatory, for the evening was sultry. Her servants had arranged the orange-trees and foreign shrubs, under which they spread the low table, covered with the whitest linen, and glittering with crystal and gold, and fragrant with rich wines, fruits, and flowers.

It was a dinner I had never seen the like of; no want of English viands of the best, but most of the dishes were foreign, and I noticed that while she pressed me to everything, Madame herself dined on pastry and fruit. Calixi and sundry silent servants waited, carved, and retired, till summoned again by a bunch of small silver bells, in the form of so many roses, which lay at Madame's right hand. We sat opposite to each other on the low, light sofas, which seemed her favourite seats.

I did my best to be entertaining, and hope I succeeded sometimes; though the duty of behaving like a gentleman was the only thing that made me speak at all. I felt like Alcibiades in the company of Socrates. I could have sat there for ever, and grown old in listening to her talk. How like new wine it was to me, so full

of intellectual life, of travel, of observation, of knowledge!—how free from care or trammels, as if nothing had ever hampered her in wish or thought, and into what a world of light and gaiety it transported me!

We talked of books, of foreign places she had seen, and fashionable people she associated with in Mayfair. She pressed me to the wine, told me anecdotes of its age and quality; there was some that had been made in Cyprus, in the crusading time; some that a Turkish vizier had drunk too much of at the siege of Rhodes. I drank because she bid me, and thought the Turk excusable, though his Koran stood in the way, but I did not quite follow his example. She had poured out a glass for me with her own fair hands,

“Will you not drink my health?” she said, with a smile which seemed to light up the wine with the sun of its native summers; “you have not done so yet.”

“It was not for want of wishing it, Madame.”

“I believe in your good wishes—you have proved them by good service; but ladies always demand pledges of their true knights. Will you do me a service more, and we will be

friends, good and faithful friends, without pride or misunderstanding?"

"I would do anything, anything in the world to serve you, Madame." Was I going to be trusted with the entire secret?—was I to be sent anywhere on her service? The words were from my heart out.

"Well, what I ask is in your power, and will serve me. Will you give me your word of honour as a gentleman, which I know you are by nature and descent—yes, La Touche is an ancient name among the nobles of Normandy, and your ancestors came into Ireland with the Fitzgeralds and Delacys—all the Palivezi have studied genealogy, but that is not to my purpose. Will you promise me never to mention to man or woman, myself included, the chance scene you saw and shared in at the dawn of Friday morning, or anything concerning it?"

Was this all? and why was it? I dared not question; but I said, with a good deal of surprise and disappointment, "I promise you that, Madame, on the honour of a gentleman."

"Give me your hand in pledge," she said; extending her own.

Our hands met above the wine, and the clasp went to my heart. How firm and friendly it

was! I felt my fingers lingering upon hers, but she hastily withdrew them, rang for coffee, and asked me whether I preferred the face of the Venus or the Diana which stood, one on either side, among the orange-trees. I think my answer was that I did not know; on which she laughed at me, and said many a man did not know his own preferences.

The rest of our conversation I cannot recal, except that it was about styles of beauty. It is my belief that I was not very bright on it. But at last I saw her looking at the timepiece—by-the-bye, it was of old Venetian make, very richly wrought, and of a quaint device; a veiled figure showed the hours; as they progressed, the veil was slowly withdrawn, but the first half revealed the profile of a beautiful woman, and the second that of a skeleton. She looked at the timepiece. I saw it was late, and rose to go.

“Good night!” she said, giving me her hand without rising; “but one word before we part. We have agreed to be friends without pride or misunderstanding, have we not?”

“Certainly, Madame.”

“Well, then, the first requisite of friendship is plain speaking. Should you like to come and

see me on honest, equal terms, for the interchange of thought and mutual help, to pass the hours that might otherwise be heavy or barren?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Madame."

"Well, but understand this friendship of ours stands apart and utterly separated from our public lives: there, you are the bank clerk, and I am Madame Palivez. We were nothing more till within the last month, when the stars brought us nearer; whether for good or evil I know not yet, but I augur well from your finding the signet-ring."

"Madame, I should be happy to be your friend on any terms."

I spoke in all sincerity, though with some surprise at the strange prudence of her arrangement. It might not have worked well with every one, but she knew her man, and smiled kindly on me as she answered.

"Those are the only terms I have to offer. We meet here, or in my villa, as friends, honest and equal; in public, we keep our respective stations. What the world does not understand should never be said before it, and friendship is a sacred thing, not to be wondered about

and misinterpreted by common minds. Your face has told me that you understand this, or I should never have spoken it."

"I do understand you, and will keep my share of the compact."

"Yes, that is a good word for it. You will keep the compact honourably in spirit and in letter, or I have not read your countenance correctly; and if so, it is the only page of the kind that ever foiled me. But we are friends. Good night! for I know it is late, and your way is long."

CHAPTER XVII.

RHODA AND LUCIEN.

It was late when I got home, but the summer night was lovely, and a new life went with me through the busy streets and quiet suburban ways.

Madame Palivez, the wonderful woman whom I had heard so much of, whom I had been so curious about, whom I had served, and could not take reward from, had chosen, nay, appointed me to be her private friend; to come and see her at her villa, or her secluded Eastern rooms behind the bank, for the interchange of thought or the passing of leisure hours on honest, equal terms, of which the world was to know nothing. Strange as it may appear, there was no part of the arrangement in which my mind acquiesced so fully as the latter clause. I did not then know

why; but that friendship seemed to me a fairy treasure not to be profaned by vulgar eyes or comments, and more securely mine because of its secrecy.

Rhoda opened the door to me with a face of great gladness at my safe return, and much wonder where I could have been.

“You are come at last, Lucien dear. I have had your supper ready these two hours, and got my aunt and Hannah to bed to keep them from grumbling. You see, my aunt got into quite a bad way when Mr. Forbes sent over, about six o’clock, to know why you were not coming. It was his own footman, Lucien: and he brought us such a lovely pheasant for to-morrow’s dinner. I am so sorry I bought that bit of mutton; howensoever, it will keep till Monday; and the Forbes’ must think a good deal of you to send so. I was very sorry, but I could not tell them where you were. My aunt got bothered about it, and in course she bothered the house.”

“I am sorry, too, Rhoda; but I could not help it. I was detained by business.”

The first part of that speech was as true as the second was false. My heart smote me for having overlooked and broken through the long

and friendly engagement of my Saturday evenings spent at Notting Hill House, when no other had a welcome for me, and all the kindness that my family had received from that quarter. The Forbes' missed me—that was evident; but I had not missed them. It must be made up for by apologies, and they must be fibs, every word: that was the first consequence of the compact I had made so willingly, and was so resolute to keep.

Poor Rhoda was not quite convinced of my detention by business. The girl had some penetration, though she could never learn to spell, the reading of her brother's face was a task more to her mind. She brought up the fat pheasant to display it in the Forbes' honour; said she was sure they must have been disappointed; and it was a pity the bank people kept me so late, for I might have gone over and told them all about it.

“It is a fine house for you to go to, Lucien dear, and I think Miss Forbes likes to see your face as well as her father,” and Rhoda looked knowing.

“Miss Forbes is friendly to us all, Rhoda, but she is a rich banker's daughter, and we are

poor folks ; besides you know I am engaged to Rosanna Joyce."

" Oh, in course, I didn't mean anything but fun ; but my aunt took on dreadful ; and, Lucien dear, you would not be going to bad places, and staying out at nights, as she says young men do in London ?"

" No, Rhoda, my good sister, I would not, never did, and never will, whatever my aunt may grumble about. You know she is an old woman, and you must try to keep her quiet. I can't always explain to you what detains me ; there may be causes which you would not understand now, but I will tell you some other time ; and be sure of one thing, that however often I go out, or late I may stay, it will not be in low company or bad places."

" Oh, I know you are too gentle for that, and too good, Lucien," said my honest, kindly sister, looking all she spoke.

What would have been her exultation of heart had she known that my evening was spent, as many were likely to be, with the great lady of the bank in Old Broad-street, the high and mighty Madame Palivez ? Our confidence was not far enough advanced for that disclosure ;

but she left me with a happy look, fully insured against the bad places, and in the conviction that I would make all right with the Forbes'.

I took early precautions for that purpose. There was a note, containing the same story I had told my sister, but more ceremoniously set forth, unavoidably detained at the bank; not aware that I should be till the last moment, with suitable regrets and acknowledgments, left in the hands of a servant at their door next morning, which being Sunday, I knew they kept after the strictest fashion of Scotland, neither receiving visitors nor going out of doors, except to church, and my tale was more easily written than told. I could not rest at home that Sunday; I could not go to the Catholic chapel with my aunt and sister.

They were still faithful children of Mother Church, particularly Miss Livey, though I had become lax and somewhat of a stray sheep. Many a lecture the old woman read me on it at our Sunday dinners, setting forth where I might expect to go in terms not to be misunderstood; but my acquaintance with the warring creeds, and their mode of carrying

on the long campaigns against each other, together with the habit of thinking for myself, which I had learned in that lonely life of mine, did not contribute to make me sound in my faith. Moreover, Catholic chapels, even in the neighbourhood of London, were poor places in those no-Popery days. The scenic accompaniments must be in good style to save that ritual from becoming ridiculous. I could not stand the ill-served ceremonies, and worse painted saints, which, doubtless, forwarded my family's devotion, with the pictures and statues in those grand, silent rooms, and the talk I had heard about them still fresh in my memory.

I walked away miles into the country, through lanes and bye-ways, among green meadows and growing corn. It was a glorious summer day, and people were abroad in all the roads and villages. I was alone, as I had always been, but the Saturday evening went with me, and when I sat down to rest in the hidden nook of a solitary hedgerow, I found myself thinking of Madame Palivez and her strangely offered friendship.

Next evening I recollected that I ought to go and see Rosanna when the day's work was done. She had not written to me after all the trouble

in which we parted. It was the dread of Sally that kept me away. That she would think of course, yet I ought to go; so I went and got into Curzon-street, though it was not the shortest way. There was one carriage at the door of the mansion where the ball had been—it was Madame's own. I knew it by the arms on the panels; and in the shelter of a convenient doorway, so as not to be seen watching, I waited till she came out, full dressed for dinner in the newest and most fashionable style, with floating lace and flashing diamonds; but the fine face and figure were still the same. I saw her step into the carriage as lightly as she had sprung from her Arab horse, throw herself back with a careless, half-scornful air, like one that knew and did not value her grandeur, and I heard her say to the coachman—"Carlton House." The supreme lady of the great banking-house had invitations from the Prince Regent, perhaps had a right to them. The princely purse was known to be more frequently empty than full, and the Palivez had always done a good deal of court business. At any rate, there would be no brighter ornament in his select society. Was she a different woman there from what I had found her? There was something in her style

of stepping into the carriage which told me she was, and little as I knew of fashionable life I felt it must be so, and felt too, with a chagrin I could not account for, how great was the distance between what she called our public lives. Perhaps I ought to have felt flattered—lifted up and made great in my own esteem, because a lady who went to Carlton House, and owned wealth and influence enough to make her a leader of fashion, if so minded, should have chosen me for her private friend. Yet my feathers fell instead of rising at that gay sight.

“You are the bank clerk, and I am Madame Palivez,” came back upon me with a shocking sense of unfitness and incompatibility and I went in a dreary humour to Bolton-row. Never did the Joyces’ rooms look so squalid and disorderly; never did Sally appear more dreadful, Jeremy more despicable, or Rosanna more uneducated though her new dress was on, and her hair not in papers, without the slightest intimation of my coming; and the poor girl received me as kindly as if I had not been careless and neglectful in seeing her but once since she came. Her elder sister made up for it by two or three keen snaps, but, on the whole, Sally was a great deal better than might have been expected. She

brought up the marriage question only in a modified form, and I took the customary affectionate leave of Rosanna at the top of the stairs, promising to come back soon and take her out some evening to the theatre.

All that week I had fears that the Forbes' might be offended. I saw none of them, and did not like to call. Notting Hill House had never been a cheerful mansion, and its gloom deepened of late, to my fancy; but Mr. Forbes had been the untiring friend of my family. Had he not cheered my father's dying, broken-hearted days, and given him the handsomest funeral that ever went out of the Marshalsea? Had he not helped to get up a home for my destitute relations; and were not his countenance and counsel still the chief help we had? I could not forget these things, and it was hard to think of having put an apparent slight on his friendship. So it seemed like a Godsend when going home from business on the following Friday, we happened to meet hard by the Mansion House, and he held out his hand to me with the accustomed kindness of look and tone.

"You are going home?" he said, after friendly inquiries for all my household, "and so am I; hadn't we better walk together it will be pleasant

now, in the cool of the evening." I agreed, and we walked on, talking in a serious, kindly way, as was his wont. "We were sorry you could not come to us on Saturday evening to meet my nephew, Charles Barry. His ship has come in from the Mediterranean. They have had a long cruise, and must refit; so Charles is a sailor on shore, not very well knowing what to do with himself, I believe. He comes to us sometimes, but our house is scarce lively enough for a young naval officer. Charles is promoted to be second lieutenant now. I wish he were more serious, more thoughtful, I should say; but his company on board ship are not likely to help him forward in that way, though they see the works of God in the deep, and his wonders in the great waters. I think you would like Charles; I am sure he would like you. Helen and I had set our minds on introducing you that evening, for he is gone to Portsmouth now."

I repeated the story of my note with as honest a look as I could assume under the circumstances; but the banker's Scottish eye was upon me, and something very like doubt in it as he said—

"I did not know you did business so late in the Palivez' bank, and your manager a Jew. Is

it possible that Esthers has so little respect for his people's Sabbath?"

"I believe most Jews regard it very little now; they are probably getting out of their old superstitions, and feel that they must advance with the rest of the world," said I, willing to let the small blame rest on the manager; "but——"

"Stop, lad," said Mr. Forbes. "It was part of the law delivered in thunder on Mount Sinai, and though they have shown a superstitious regard for the letter of it in our Gospel ages, remember any Sabbath is better than none. The one day set apart from worldly cares and employments gives man time to think of eternal things, and brings him near to his Maker. The Jews were an example to Christians in their Sabbath-keeping, but I fear that, as you say, they are growing careless of it now in this busy London."

We were out of London by this time, and quickening our pace along the Uxbridge road, for a heavy cloud had come over the evening sky; there were faint growls of far-off thunder, and great drops of rain beginning to fall.

"The shower will be heavy when it comes," said Mr. Forbes; and at that moment I caught

sight of a lady coming quickly towards us : it was his daughter Helen in the brown silk dress, Paisley shawl, and beaver hat, which formed her sober out-door dress. One would have taken her for a maiden of fifty but for the rapid step and brightly-tinged cheek with which she came to meet her father. Miss Forbes was certainly looking better of late. What an advantage the heightened colour was to her thin face ! how much of the primness and precision had the evening wind and the coming shower taken off ! and with what a kindly glance and smile she came up to us !

“Gude lass, you will get a wet shawl by meeting me this evening,” said her father, clasping her one hand while I shook the other and hoped Miss Forbes was well.

Just at that moment my ear caught the sound of coming hoofs ; and riding at full speed to escape the thunder shower, but still alone, Madame Palivez swept past us like the very wind. We every one looked at her till she was out of sight. I could not help it, though she never looked at me—never seemed to notice that there was any one on the road.

“How well she rides ! how grand and hand

some she is!" said Helen, a glow of enthusiastic admiration lighting up her whole face.

"She is handsome, and she rides well," said Forbes, with a long look after the disappearing habit; "yet it strikes me that woman has had her troubles. We are born to them as the sparks fly upward, and the worst are those we make for ourselves. But Helen will be drowned," he continued, as the rain came down faster, and was driven upon us by rising gusts from the west.

"Come home with me," said I, drawing Helen's arm within my own, for the wind seemed to whistle through her thin form, and threaten to take her shawl away; "we shall reach the house in five minutes; there will be shelter there, and something to warm us, I'll be bound."

It was no time for parley or consideration; the storm was up in its fury. I kept fast hold of Helen; held down her shawl; saved her hat with my handkerchief; and, thanks to Rhoda's haste in opening the door, we three got in with little damage. Rhoda was in a great fluster—I thought at the sight of the unexpected company, but a second look showed me that something still more unusual had occurred.

“What is it, Rhoda?” said I, as soon as we got into the parlour, knowing that everybody saw it as well as myself.

“It is blood money!” cried Miss Livey, entering in such a state of excitement that she neither saw nor heeded the strangers—“blood money! but I’ll never touch a farthing of it. You young folks may do as you please. You are past my advising, with your love of fashions and finery. If you get money for them, you don’t care how it comes; but I’ll neither eat nor drink the price of Raymond’s blood.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS FORBES WILL BE AN HEIRESS.

STARTLED by the energy of Miss Livey, we turned towards her, but even as she spoke a flash of forked lightning shone in among us, filling the room with fire, and a peal of thunder right overhead made the house shake to its foundations. I heard something fall heavily, but my eyes were dazzled into momentary blindness by the glare. Then the screams of Hannah Clark, who had followed her mistress, brought me to my senses, and I saw it was Mr. Forbes.

I ran and lifted him up—he was a light weight for so large a man—and placed him on the sofa, with a fearful impression that the lightning had struck him on account of a steel watch-guard he wore. His face had taken that blue paleness said to come with deadly fear or cold,

but the steel chain was untouched, and before I had well got him up, he opened his eyes.

Poor Helen was by his side. What sense and presence of mind the quiet girl showed in that sudden trial! She had been the first to rush to her father; helped me to raise him without noise or exclamation, and now, as he returned to consciousness, almost pushed me away; threw her thin arms about him; laid his head on her breast, and said in a low, tender tone—"Dear father, can you speak? are you hurt?"

"I am not, Helen. But what was it that came into the room? did you see it?" and he shook all over as if with sudden palsy.

"It was a terrible flash of lightning, father; did it strike you?"

"No, dear; but I am getting old and weakly. I suppose it must have been an electric shock. Stop, Lucien!" continued the strong-minded man of the North, raising himself as he saw me starting off for a doctor; "there is no want of medical aid, except for your aunt there. What is the matter, Miss Livey?"

His words directed my attention to the poor old woman, who leant against the opposite wall, gazing vacantly on us like one really thunder-

struck, while Rhoda stood hiding her head in the corner where she had taken refuge, and Hannah Clark renewed her screams behind the door. There was but one way to manage Hannah in that state of excitement. I pushed her out, shut the door upon her, and not seeing the agitation of others, she settled into silence in the passage, sitting down on the stair, and covering her eyes with her hands. I sat my aunt down on a chair too. She drew a long breath, uttered a pious ejaculation or two, and we saw that Miss Livey had only got a terrible fright. Rhoda came out of her corner; Mr. Forbes became himself again. He and his daughter repeated a brief thanksgiving with bowed heads and clasped hands. The lightning flashes became less fierce and frequent; the thunder rolled away eastward to frighten people in London, and I gathered sufficient composure to say—"Now, Rhoda, since we have all heard something of it, tell me what has happened to trouble my aunt so."

"I am sure it is not bad news, Lucien, though we don't understand it, but you will. Here is the lawyer's letter;" and she brought from the mantelpiece, where it had lain unnoticed, a large, legal-looking epistle addressed

to Miss Olivia La Touche, by Messrs. Kelly and Carson, solicitors, Four Courts Alley, Dublin, informing her with lawyer-like precision and brevity that an annuity of two hundred per annum had been purchased for herself and her niece, Miss Rhoda La Touche, during their joint lives, the whole to be enjoyed by the survivor, and to be paid quarterly through their firm. Messrs. Kelly and Carson further declared themselves to be unacquainted with the name of the purchaser, and professed their readiness to send the requisite documents when they heard from Miss La Touche.

I read that communication with feelings I could never describe. It was no hoax, no practical joke, dry and silly as such things generally are. The name and style of Kelly and Carson were well known to me. They were one of the oldest and most respectable firms in Dublin—had done legal business for my father as well as for my uncle. Miss Livey and my sister were provided for, safe from want and dependence, whatever became of me; but who had done the gracious thing? I did not know my eyes had turned that way as I lifted them from the letter, but Mr. Forbes, looking as much surprised as myself, for I had read it aloud, said—"No,

Lucien, I solemnly declare to you and your family, I have no hand in this business, and know nothing of it, though it is one which no man would disown. Some friend of your father's—somebody of the many he helped in their adversity—has remembered his child and father's sister. May the Lord remember it to them, whatever be their motive for concealment!"

"Amen," said I. "Rhoda, my girl, you were right; it is good news for us all. Aunt, dear, why do you trouble yourself with such foolish notions? the money comes from some kind friend, who does not wish to be known, lest it might look like charity. At all events, Rhoda and you are provided for, and you ought to be thankful."

"Maybe I ought, Lucien," said poor Miss Livey—that lightning flash had worked wonders on her temper, which thus came in contact with a fire fiercer than its own—"maybe I ought; money is a good thing with God's blessing, no matter who sends it. Rhoda will be provided for. There is no use in talking of me, for I won't want provision long in this world. Oh, but it is the troublesome place, and full of strange happenings; but I am an old woman,

and that thunder has shaken my head. I'll go and lie down, and you can settle all about the money among yourselves."

So Rhoda helped her upstairs, and we sat talking over the news, good and strange as it was. Mr. Forbes was now composed and serious as ever. He soberly congratulated me, in a manner which seemed conclusive regarding his having no previous knowledge of the transaction; what I knew of the man also convinced me that he would not make a solemn and unrequired declaration, except it were strictly true. Helen was even warmer in her congratulations, though the poor girl still looked pale and troubled about her father. He seemed in haste to go. Now that the rain had spent itself, and the sky was clearing fast, no entreaties of mine could make him stay or take any refreshment. "We will go home to dinner," said he; "the air is cool and fresh now after the rain; it will blow the fright and confusion off us; and though the road is wet, both Helen and I wear thick shoes."

Away they went down the deep-running road; Helen looked back at me with a kindly smile as I watched them from the door through the deepening twilight, filled with the scents

that rise in rural places after summer rain ; and when they were fairly out of sight, I stood there still—till Rhoda crept out to my side, laid her hand on my shoulder, looked up with her rosy face full of contented joy, and said—“ Now, Lucien dear, you will have no more burden of us—all your earnings will be your own ; you can marry Rosanna, and bring her home. We can soon get another house, if she don't like us to live here ; though I would rather stay, if my aunt and her could agree, and she could take with poor Hannah—for in course we'll keep her.”

“ Do you know that Rosanna has come from America with her sister and brother, and they are living in London ?”

I had no difficulty in telling my sister, now that it involved no fears for herself.

“ No, Lucien ; how could I, when you did not tell me ?”

“ I did not know myself till one day last week ; but there they are, and we shall have an opportunity of seeing whether my aunt and Rosanna could agree or not.”

“ Maybe they would,” said Rhoda ; “ but I am glad you told me the Joyces was come ; I'll always know where you be, Lucien, when

you stay out late on Saturday evenings, and the Forbes' send their servant to look for you."

I recognised the full value of the insinuation, but turned my honest sister off with—"So you would like to stay with me, Rhoda?—all your life, is it, or only till you see somebody you will like better?"

"I'll never see one I'll like better than you, Lucien; you are all the brother I have. Many a time, when you were in America, and I sat spinning at the lead window of our back room over yonder in Ireland—I wonder if Jenny Short has got a glass one put in, as she said she would when our tails was turned—many a time, when I sat there, and heard the great sighing of the sea coming up, through the long quiet days, I thought how wide it was between us, and minded the summer times long ago, when we used to play together all by ourselves, building houses at the foot of the woodbine wall, and gathering moss to make carpets for them off the old apple-trees in our father's garden in Armagh. When the rest went from me, one by one, I never missed them as much as I did you. And yet how strange you looked to me that night on the quay, Lucien! but that has wore off, and I mind on the old play-times still when you are

out at the bank ; it just keeps me from hearing my aunt grumbling. Howsomever, she is getting over that uncommonly. I think Rosanna will be able to stand her ; but, goodness me ! what could have put that in her head about the money, Lucien ?—and what do you think came over Mr. Forbes ?”

“ An electric shock, I think.”

“ Some stroke of the lightning. Well, maybe it was ; nobody never saw such a flash. I got a glimpse of his face out of that corner, Lucien, and, though I never saw the like, thank God, it looked to me just what one might be that had died of fright.”

“ I think the flash did frighten him more than he cared to acknowledge. Mr. Forbes is not a strong man. But as for aunt’s notions about the money, there is no use in minding them ; it has come from some friend of our father—somebody that owed him, perhaps, more than we know of, and had a right to remember you and Miss Livey for his sake ; depend on it we will find that out in time.”

“ Would it be the great bank lady you found the ring for ?” She had hit on a supposition which occurred to my own mind, on stronger grounds than Rhoda was aware of, but had been

discarded more than once. Why should the business be done through a Dublin solicitor? Madame Palivez had a London firm in regular employment ever since the bank was established in Old Broad-street; it was not likely that she would take such a mode of rewarding me, after what had passed between us; and though I reasoned the impression away, it always returned upon me that there was some truth in my poor aunt's unaccountable conclusion, and that the mysteriously purchased annuity had something to do with my lost brother—perhaps, indeed, the result of his late repentance, if he had really been the sinner we took him for.

“That would be a good price for a ring, Rhoda,” I said, as she repeated the question, and I had thought over it for at least the seventh time.

“So it would, and it's to yourself she would give it, not to us; in course she don't know that the like of us is living, but I know she'll do something for you yet, Lucien. Is not Miss Forbes the nice young lady—not handsome to be sure, but so good to everybody, and not a bit of pride about her? she comes here and speaks to Hannah and me, wanting me to teach her the Bible, which can't be done nohow, that

I am able to think on, but it's very good of Miss Forbes, Lucien ; I would rather have her than that bank lady."

"What do you know of the bank lady, Rhoda?" The gathering darkness kept her from seeing my surprise.

"Well, nothing ; but I see her riding by here, and away through the fields. I am sure she looks at our house every time she passes, and once I saw her looking at me so mighty sharp, that I was ashamed and left the window."

"Perhaps you were taking too much notice of her, Rhoda ; Madame Palivez is a great lady, of immense wealth, and in the first society ; the Prince Regent invites her to Carlton House ; he and all the foreign ambassadors and people of fashion go to the grand balls and parties she gives at her mansion in Mayfair ; I have seen the street in front of it quite filled with their carriages ; and if she rides about the country alone, it is for her own whim or fancy ; Madame might have half-a-dozen grooms after her, if she pleased."

"Oh ! I know she is very high and grand, and I am sure I didn't look at her too forward or curious-like ; but one can't help looking at her, Lucien, she is so uncommon, and handsome

too ; but she is proud, Lucien ; it is in her eye and in her air, and I would rather have Miss Forbes.”

“Miss Forbes is a very good, very kind lady, and has a fine cousin, a young naval officer, who comes there when his ship is in port, and Miss Forbes will be an heiress.”

“Oh, no doubt, and heiresses always gets young men enough ; but I am sure I wish her a good one,” said Rhoda, with a half sigh.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONFERENCE.

HOURS after all the household were in bed, I lay awake, thinking of the events of the day and the talk with my sister. It was true what she said: I might marry Rosanna, and bring her home now without compunction or fear of the future. Rhoda and Miss Livey were independent of me; but would it be kind to send them from me in the strange country—strange to them as any corner of the world could be—now, when we had learned and become reconciled to each other's ways? My only sister, whose memory clung so fondly to our early play times, between whom and me affection and confidence were growing up from the old roots, as wild flowers come when the winters are over—my poor old grand-aunt, who had by this time grown at home in my house as she was not likely to do in another, for the lightning had shown me how far her

sands had run—would it be kindly, would it be wise to move them to another home, perhaps by way of making room for Sally Joyce and Jeremy? The terrors of that succession had haunted me at intervals ever since my engagement with Rosanna had been formed. There are no barriers against relations in law so sure as born kindred. Would it not be prudent, and one's duty to wait for some time, get them gradually introduced, and see if Rosanna and Miss Livey could agree? I knew Rhoda would agree with anybody; and it might be well to find out what brought the Joyces from America.

They could know nothing of the Dublin lawyer's letter; there was nothing to hinder me from keeping it judiciously to myself. I felt inclined to that course from other motives not so easily put in words. By whomsoever that annuity had been purchased, the moving cause concerned my lost brother. That was a conviction which I could neither establish satisfactorily nor reason away. The Joyces would come to the same conclusion; and it would be no easy task to hear Sally on the subject. How had that boy become the spectre of our house, haunting the last of us through strange lands and altered fortunes, one of the black shadows

of which Madame Palivez had spoken! My thoughts reverted to her from every topic and channel.

I had heard nothing of or from her since the day she chose me for her friend, and made that queer compact with me—seen nothing except the flash of her diamonds going to Carlton House, and the flutter of her green habit when she swept past me, without glance or sign of recognition, on the road to her villa. Yet Rhoda saw her pass the house and look keenly at its windows; her inquiring glances had frightened my sister from the post of observation, and Rhoda had an abiding conviction of her pride and haughtiness. Perhaps the girl was right; yet what cause had I to wonder or be displeased? Was not Madame's whole course of a piece with the terms on which she offered, and I accepted, friendship? was she not still the great lady, and I the humble clerk? Were we—could we be friends long, or really, on such terms? I had accepted and could not change them; had it been in my power, I could not for my very soul have told what change I should make.

In the meantime, what ought I to do? Did she expect me to go and visit her unsent for,

by that private door in the churchyard wall? She had not told me so; but I knew Madame did not. Should I find my way to her villa? She might not be there—she might not want me. How did I know what kind of an establishment she pleased to keep in that hermitage? and with the thought there came a sudden memory of the wild, ragged man, with his long knife and fierce growl about somebody that had been murdered; and then, by an instinct of the mind which I cannot explain, my suspicion of her fearing Esthers, and the tale of his being her cousin, crossed me, and again I asked myself the question—was my grand-aunt and sister's annuity purchased with the notes of the Palivez bank?

The days that followed that of the thunder-storm must have been long, bright, midsummer ones, but they have grown dim and confused in my recollection, for the thoughts thus sketched went with me through their work and play—if one ever gets the latter after childhood. I remember writing to Messrs. Kelly and Carson a grateful acceptance of the two hundred per annum, in Miss Livey and Rhoda's names; I remember observing how quiet and thoughtful my grand-aunt had grown, as if the sight of

that terrible flash which struck down the strong man in her presence was still upon her. She rose late next day—according to Rhoda's report—gave no bother at all, sat spinning slowly in her accustomed corner, welcomed me kindly, and without a grumble, when I came home from the bank, and began to take more than usual to her rosary.

I remember walking slowly home that Saturday evening, assuring myself I would be in good enough time for going to the Forbes', and looking round at the most distant sound of a horse's hoof. Nobody but old gentlemen riding home to dinner at their country houses passed me; but as I approached the very spot where Madame Palivez first stopped and talked to me about her signet-ring, there was a lady evidently awaiting my approach. It was not a green habit, but a Paisley shawl she wore; and I quickened my pace to salute Miss Forbes.

“Oh, Mr. La Touche, I have been wishing for an opportunity to thank you for your care and kindness to my father in that terrible storm,” she said, when we had a friendly shake-hands, and the tears were coming into her soft, earnest eyes.

“I expect and deserve no thanks for anything I shall ever be able to do in your father’s service, Miss Forbes; and I only hope that Providence will one day put it in my power to acknowledge the deep debt of gratitude which I and my family owe to him.”

“Oh, my father does not consider you his debtor at all; he is always happy when he can do anything for anybody; and your father and he were old friends, were they not?” How well and easily she spoke on the subject!

“Mr. Forbes was the only friend my father had in his sore adversity; when those he had associated with and served in his prosperous days stood aloof or turned their backs on him, your father came forward, like a generous man and a true Christian as he is, assisted, cheered, and did the last offices of friendship for him. Oh, Miss Forbes, I can never forget, never repay that obligation, if it were the only one he had conferred on me and mine.”

“You are very good to think and speak so well of him; I know it is partly justice, though my father never will let his good deeds be spoken of, especially those you have mentioned. Sometimes I wish he did not think quite so humbly of himself; but no doubt it is his stronger faith and clearer

knowledge which teach him that humility I have yet to learn ; but if you knew him as I do, Mr. La Touche, though it may look vain and foolish for me to say so, you would believe that, if there was ever a saint on earth, he must be one—so righteous, so good, so self-denying, leading such a blameless, pious life, with nothing of the Pharisee in him, and more charitable to every creature than himself.”

While she heard and spoke her father’s praise, Helen’s thin colourless face had been lighted up with a glow of honest pride and affection, that positively made it beautiful ; but when I answered, “ I believe it from my heart, Miss Forbes, and, like you, I sometimes wonder why he so dislikes to hear his good works referred to, particularly by myself, who has most reason to remember them,” the flush suddenly faded, and her eyes drooped, as if with some painful recollection.

“ It is strange,” she said, after a minute’s pause, “ but no doubt he fears the growth of spiritual pride ; it is a rank and insidious weed, as the best divines tell us ; perhaps you don’t read their books, Mr. La Touche?—pardon me, I am forgetting you belong to a different church, and I am forgetting my message too. I have

been at your house, seeing Miss Livey; my father made me promise to go over some time, to-day; you see he had to go to Edinburgh on business this morning, very particular business, I believe, on account of some information Mr. Esthers sent him last night. He says it was the kindest thing in the world, and what nobody could have expected from a Jew. I am sure I never would have expected anything very good from Mr. Esthers, but one is apt to judge uncharitably; I suppose it is a great mistake to estimate people by their looks, and I shall always think better of him for doing such good service to my father."

"I am glad to hear of it, though it is the last thing I would have expected of Esthers either; he certainly has it in his power to send correct and early information to any gentleman in your father's business, if he be only willing; and for my own part, I also shall think better of the manager for serving Mr. Forbes."

There was another reflection arising to my lips—by-the-bye, it had been the first in my mind—to the effect that Esthers was solicitous for the banker's acquaintance as well as that of his daughter, and sincerely envied my intimacy at their house; but the little discretion I had, to-

gether with the dread of appearing envious in my turn, made me change the subject by saying —“ I am rejoiced to hear that your father was well enough to take so long a journey after the shock he suffered.”

“ Oh, it did not injure him at all ; but how very strange that he should have been so struck ? Does it often happen, Mr. La Touche, that people are struck by lightning, and yet escape uninjured ?”

There was something anxious, almost fearful in her look. How much the girl’s serious, solitary life was bound up in the equally lonely and sober one of her father ! She had hit on a query which puzzled myself, and got the only answer I had to give :

“ I am not aware that it often happens ; but the laws of electricity are but imperfectly known to us—at any rate, Mr. Forbes has escaped, and doubtless will have no bad consequences.”

“ I hope not ; he told me he was quite well this morning when we parted, and made me promise to see Miss Livey and tell you that he would be home on Saturday week, and we should expect you in the evening ; perhaps cousin Charles will be up from Portsmouth by that time.”

“ He won’t stay long in Portsmouth while you

are in the neighbourhood of London, I suspect, Miss Forbes.”

It was impertinent curiosity mingling with some distant influence of the Blarney Stone that originated that speech, but Helen was not flattered ; on the contrary, she looked a little vexed, and said—

“ Oh, you are entirely mistaken ; the consideration of my being in any neighbourhood would weigh very lightly with Charles ; he is my cousin-german, but does not care much for our house or company—he prefers gay life, and finds us rather dull ; but I was going to say, how well Miss Livey had got over the fright—it was only a fright, in her case, I suppose ? ”

“ Nothing more ; she is very old, has seen a great deal of trouble, and her peculiar trials have made her a little odd.”

“ So they do make most of us,” said Helen, sighing, and looking as if she, too, were above seventy. “ Miss Livey did not understand the lawyer’s letter, you see, and it disturbed her ; I think she does not quite understand it yet ; but your sister does—what a good sensible girl she is, and what a blessing she may be to you, Mr. La Touche ; so dutiful to her grand-aunt, and so good to poor Hannah Clark ; perhaps it is tak-

ing a great liberty, but I do wish you and she would try to teach that poor girl some of the things that belong to eternity ; but I am keeping you standing here, and I know you want to go home.”

“ No, indeed, Miss Forbes ; but the dew is falling—won’t you come back to the house with me and take tea ? ”

“ Oh, dear no, I am very much obliged, but I always like to be at home when my father is absent. I will come over and see Miss Livey some time soon, and talk to your sister about Hannah, if she will let me.”

“ My sister will be glad to hear you talk about anything, and so shall we all, Miss Forbes ; but allow me to see you home ? ”

“ Oh, not for the world ; you must be tired with the long day in the bank, I am sure, and it is not late ; I could not think of giving you so much trouble.”

“ No trouble at all,” said I, drawing her arm within mine, for she was now going, and there was gentleman’s duty to be done—not to speak of her being Mr. Forbes’ daughter.

Helen looked pleased and flattered for the first time in all our acquaintance, reminding me of Rosanna, and as we walked on talking,

not as Rosanna and I used to do, but concerning my grand-aunt's age and fright; the merciful dispensation of Providence by which she and Rhoda were provided for; the praises of the latter, which my heart echoed, every word; and the duty and necessity of instructing Hannah Clark.

When we reached Notting Hill House, I knew it was proper to take my leave. Helen was far too prudent to ask a gentleman in while her father was absent, but she lingered with me at the gate before pulling the bell, glanced along the road, and said:

“That's the way Madame Palivez rides home to her villa, but I have not seen her to-day. Mr. Esthers said in his note to papa she was so occupied with a friend of hers—I forget his name, but he is a Russian prince—that she stays mostly at the West-end; but good-bye, I have detained you shamefully; if my father were at home I am sure he would scold me.”

I made my declarations of being pleased and honoured, and still blaming herself, but with a brighter smile and lighter step than ever I imagined she could exhibit, Helen left me at the open gate and tripped into the house.

Far down the avenue of trees and along the open road I looked back—it was the villa way—but my eye also caught Mr. Forbes' bay-window ; somebody was standing there, half hidden by the curtain, but the head was turned towards me, and I knew the banker's daughter was seeing me home.

What of that? Miss Forbes had a way of looking after people, it was her only amusement. Church-going and good books, needle-work and visiting the poor, could fill up nobody's life. It was out of that very window she watched Madame Palivez. How much more information concerning her would Esthers be able to give, now that he had made good his footing in Notting Hill House. There was a long-desired object attained at last, and Esthers had shown his discernment by taking the most direct way to it. Ordinary people may be won by flattery or attentions ; prudent ones can be bought only by serving their interests.

CHAPTER XX.

POOR MISS LIVEY.

THE important information which sent Mr. Forbes off to Edinburgh that Saturday morning was made clear to my understanding some three weeks after, when the Lothian bank suddenly stopped payment, and all who had transactions with that long-established house were serious losers, except himself. I knew the prudent banker well enough—while only guessing it must be something of the kind—to believe that solid, useful service done to his business must secure Esthers a high place in his good graces. I also observed that the manager intended to stand well with his daughter. He had particulars of the lady-superior to communicate for her edification, which were carefully kept from my ears. I had never heard a syllable about

the Russian prince, though Esthers' civility to me seemed to increase hourly. His private reasons for that silence I could not yet fathom, but the motive of his communications was plain.

In Helen's admiring interest in Madame Palivez and her doings, as sincere as it was undisguised, there appeared to me the one touch of romance in her quiet and methodical life; it was so unlike what might have been expected from her opposite nature and habits—such a contradiction of the world's report regarding the hostility of plain women to handsome ones. I marvelled at, I half admired her for it; and friendly as we were, it was the only sentiment of hers in which I had any sympathy.

Esthers had found it out—the powers of plotting best know how—and meant to make it a fulcrum for his lever wherewith to move the heart of Miss Forbes. Yes, that was his drift or design. There was a smirking smile got up whenever her name happened to be mentioned—a familiar tone assumed in his enquiries after the young lady's welfare—which had become frequent of late.

The manager seemed to have forgiven my

goings to Notting Hill House, and condescended to converse with me about the Forbes' family as our mutual friends. He had made good his entrance, and he was an able general.

Moreover, there was every inducement to employ his powers. Helen was her father's only heiress. The mercantile wealth and status on which Esthers' heart and hopes were set might be achieved through her, and I had no doubt of him playing his cards well; but there was that in Helen's look when we sat together at the bay window, and her pale cheek flushed as she blamed herself for not liking the manager—ay, and that very evening, when she promised to think better of him for serving her father, there was that which assured me that on her gentle, pious, upright nature, the best-laid scheme or acted part could have no power. For all his cunning, Esthers was not the man to win the Scotch banker's heiress. Helen never could like him, for all his news and service; but her talk, quiet as it was, always did me a sort of spiritual good. What ought to be done was apt to come into my mind on such occasions; and when I had seen that all was right at home, it sent me to see Rosanna.

I went wondering who the Russian prince was, or if Esthers had coined that piece of gossip, having none else to tell; and I found myself once more in Curzon-street, opposite Madame's house. It was lighted up for another gala—not a ball this time; there were fewer carriages, fewer gazers; and I learned, from the passing discourse of an orange girl and a pastry-cook's boy, that Madame was giving a select dinner-party. The study and worship of high life go down to every grade of the West-end; the costermongers and street-boys around me were familiar with the names and titles of the arriving company. I stood there waiting for the mention of the Russian prince, looking out for any individual who might be his Northern highness: but I saw nothing of the kind. There were turbaned dowagers and old officers with ribbons and stars; and when the door was finally shut, and the last carriage driven away, I walked into Bolton-row.

The slatternly maid admitted me as usual, but she was in haste to answer an impatient bell; and I was making my own way to the attic, though it was getting dark by this time, and the solitary lamp was not yet lighted, when almost at the top a man's voice reached me from

the Joyces' rooms; it was not Jeremy's subdued tone. I stopped short, and the next moment saw Rosanna rushing down.

"Is it you, Lucien dear?" she said, in a frightened whisper (how keen the poor girl's ear had grown regarding my voice and step!) "Don't come up, for goodness sake! Sally is in a fit—the worst one ever she had, and if she sees you it will make her ten times worsen. That notion about us not getting married soon enough runs in her head so. Oh, Lucien! she gives Jeremy and me no life at all;" and Rosanna began to sob at the foot of the third flight, to which we had now got down.

"Don't vex yourself, Rosanna," said I; "perhaps we may get married sooner than Sally thinks." Nothing but my prudent resolution touching the introduction of her and Miss Livey kept me from telling her the good news on the spot. "But why did she work herself into a fit this evening? And is that a doctor I hear talking in your room?"

"Oh, yes—we had to send for one," said Rosanna, already giving up her sobs. "But why do you think we will get settled so soon? Have you got a better situation, or somebody to take your aunt and sister? for goodness sake

do tell me, my own dear, darling Lucien; I haven't a minute to stay, for if she knew you were here, the house would not hold her."

"Well, Rosanna, don't stay, I'll tell you all some other time, when Sally is better."

"Oh! she will be well enough on Monday evening, I am sure; but can't you tell me now?"

"No, Rosanna, I cannot; but I'll come and see you on Monday evening. Good night; be a good girl, and don't vex yourself whatever Sally says. We will be happy yet."

"Oh! I'll go down with you to the door. It is such a pleasure to see you for a minute longer, my own dear Lucien;" she clung to my arm. How hard it was to hold on my prudent course; but it was for the best, and all should be made up to her hereafter. We went down the dark stairs in kindly company. She promised not to grieve; said she could trust me to the world's end; her Lucien never would forsake her. We had our tender leave-taking in the passage, which happened to be left to ourselves.

I heard the doctor's tones rising louder above, and it struck me as something strange that there was laughter mingling with them. Per-

haps the medical man was not particular in an attic. I promised to come back punctually on Monday evening; promised to be always faithful, ay, and intended it; yet felt relieved when fairly under the street lamps.

On the following Sunday it was my duty to escort my grand-aunt and sister on an invitation which had been long pending to the house of the Masons, Watt Wilson's relations.

Honest people, they lived in Brook Green-lane, Hammersmith, then a pretty street of small, new houses, running out into the common, but now gone down considerably in appearance and respectability. The head of the house and husband of Watt's sister was a clerk like myself, not indeed in a bank, but in a mercantile house. His salary was as large as mine; his responsibilities were not much greater, though he had six young children, but Wilson had impressed the ancient descent and grandeur of the La Touches of Armagh so deeply on the family mind, that from the father to the baby in long clothes, every one of the Masons revered us, and put forth all their resources of fare and manners for our suitable entertainment. The hard-working, well-doing pair and their

six little ones have no place in this story of mine.

They were the only society my grand-aunt and sister had: useful and safe acquaintances, friends as the world goes. I valued them as such, and made myself at home with them for the time. Our association was long and familiar, cemented by good offices on either side, and with nothing hard or unpleasant to look back on; but of that particular Sunday afternoon spent under their hospitable roof, I remember chiefly my own deep disgust at the necessary accompaniments of family life, with a narrow income and an increasing household.

The crying baby, for whom there was no distant nursery; the larger and more troublesome children, in evident want of a governess; the absence of elegance and taste; the number crowded up in such small spaces, jarred on my mind as they had never done before, and at the same time I recollected that with such means Mason could do no better, and neither could I, if in his circumstances.

Was that the prospect before me and Rosanna? was that the home we had to expect?

I knew she would never be such a manager

as Mason's wife. I knew that Jeremy, Sally, and the fits, were always to be seen in the background, if not in our very front, and I inwardly rejoiced at the prudent reserve which at least insured me a respite from such penalties. I remember Watt Wilson doing the honours. He was the director of that house, the Masons being only managers under him, in right of his bachelorhood, and the savings once placed at my disposal. Miss Livey had always liked him; he was the last link to her former life, country, and associations, now within the old woman's reach. Our expedition to his sister's house had been undertaken partly to cheer her up from that unnatural quiet, superinduced, as we thought, by the fright in the thunder-storm. Wilson was aware of that. He talked to her of the old times that were still good in her memory; of the Easters and Christmases kept in Armagh, when our house was yet unscathed by misfortune, and she was its manager.

For once since her coming to London, all that had come and gone since then seemed to slip away from Miss Livey's mind; her old face brightened up till it almost lost the wrinkles of nearly four-score years, with the recollections of jokes and merry-makings, and friends that had

long gone the way of the roses. I had never seen her so blithe and bright since the spring-time of my seventh year.

Wilson vowed she was growing young again. The honest fellow would see us home; as he remarked, there was some walking to do. The London and Hammersmith coach set us down at Church-street, one of the outlying arms at Kensington, from whence, by cross ways, we got to Petersburg-place.

“Take my arm, Miss Livey,” said Wilson, as he helped her out of the coach. “Let these young folks run on before us, they don’t mind as much as you and I do.”

“Thank you, Watt, thank you; but if it is all the same to him, I would rather take Lucien’s arm. Many a time he has helped me over this rough road; maybe it isn’t so rough, neither, only I think it, as I did many a thing. Oh! but this world is deceiving. That’s it Lucien, my boy,” she continued, as I drew her arm into mine, “many a time you helped me along, but this is the last of it.”

“Nonsense, aunt,” said I, “we will walk here many a day to see the Masons, and home again.”

“I don’t think it, Lucien. Something tells

me my time is nearly come. I haven't felt so light of heart and cheerful these twenty years. It is just as if nothing at all had happened, though I know it has, and more than ever I knew before; but we won't talk of that. The Lord will bring it all to light in His good time, which won't be within my day, and how should it? I have lived to see my youngest grand-nephew a tall, handsome man, the image of his father. I hope you'll be as good, and have better luck, Lucien. You have been a good boy to us, and you'll get a blessing for it. You and Rhoda are the last of them all—the family I saw so many and merry. I wake out of sleep here in the long nights with the voices of the children ringing in my ears, as they rang through the old house before trouble came. You and Rhoda are the last of them, and you will be kind to one another when I am dead and gone."

"Aunt, dear," cried Rhoda, "you are not going to die!" Wilson and I broke in with a similar remonstrance. It was strange to hear Miss Livey talk so on that sweet summer evening, when the trees were full of leaves, and the sky in the flush of sunset. The thought of her departure had never come to me as a grief till then; the old woman seemed so wise,

so amiable, so sorely tired, so underrated—my heart smote me for my own share in the last-mentioned. I made good resolutions for time to come, and declared, in chorus with Wilson and Rhoda, that she would live and walk with us for many a year.

“I know better, children, and the Lord’s will be done! Long life is not a desirable thing; you’ll think so, when you come to know it as I do. I remember saying so to your poor sisters when they were going; but not one of them would believe me. Oh, but this world is deceiving, and a poor place to fix our minds on, with its falsehoods and its changes; there is nothing certain but the sky above and the grave below, children—the grass must be long and green over them this summer, as it grows over all the dead; but up there,” and she pointed to the sky, “what a place it must be above the sun and moon, the clouds and the troubles!—but, dear me, is this our house? It looks prettier than ever I thought it before;” and Miss Livey stepped cheerfully in.

We had left Hannah Clark at home, somewhat against Rhoda’s mind; her peculiar mode of conversation offended my gentility, and would not have conduced to the quiet of the Masons’

house. I had therefore installed, by way of caretaker and company, a certain honest charwoman, of Miss Forbes' recommending, who had been employed about No. 9 since our settlement there, was known to be sober and steady—having a husband of the contrary kind and three small children to keep—and her name was Mrs. Muncy.

When Hannah opened the door to us with accustomed demonstrations, and the good woman stood waiting in the passage till they subsided, I knew she had something to say.

“What is it, Mrs. Muncy?” said I, as soon as hearing could be obtained.

“If you please, sir, there has been a gentleman here, about an hour after you went, inquiring in the kindest manner for all the family, and yourself particularly.”

“Did he leave his name or card?”

“No, sir, nothing of the kind, though I axed him two or three times, saying how disappointed you would be; but he said he would call again, and discoursed—I mean, made a deal of signs with his face and fingers—to Hannah. I am sure she understood him, for you never heard or saw how she went on answering like; but I couldn't make out a notion of what he was say-

ing, though I should have liked to," says Mrs. Muncy, twisting her apron-string.

"What was he like?" said I, in hopes of knowing my visitor by description. But, gracious reader, did you ever try how many ordinary people could describe either a person or place so as to let you know one from another?

"Well, sir, he was like a gentleman," said Mrs. Muncy, twisting away.

"What had he on?"

"A coat and a hat, sir."

"Was he tall?"

"Not very tall, sir."

"Was he little?"

"Not very little, sir."

"What sort of a face had he?"

"A middling nice face." At this point I gave up in despair; but Rhoda having taken Hannah in hand in the kitchen, now came to my assistance with, "Hannah says it was the priest."

"Well, maybe it wor a Catholic clergyman," said Mrs. Muncy, who happened to be a sound Protestant; "you knows best, Miss, and so does Hannah; but he didn't look very like it to me. Howsomever, I did all I could with him to leave his name, and when he calls again you'll see him yourselves."

“Don’t you think Father Connolly would have left his name, Rhoda?” said I, when we were in the parlour and the charwoman out of hearing—our parish priest did visit us sometimes, though never before on Sunday; and Mrs. Muncy’s declaration that the visitor did not look like a Catholic clergyman weighed on my mind, and I could not help adding, “Are you sure Hannah tells the truth?”

“I never knowed her to tell stories, and I am sure she knows F’ather Connolly; he might have been coming to see after Miss Livey, Sunday as it is. It was queer of him not to leave his name; but he’ll come some day next week, I’ll warrant. I never thought Father Connolly could sign and talk to Hannah; the last time he was here he did not understand a word she said; but is it not the good thing, Lucien? He’ll be able to teach her all that Miss Forbes wants me to do, and I am sure I can’t, let me try ever so. But, goodness me, my aunt’s away upstairs herself, and hasn’t nobody to help off with her bonnet,” said Rhoda, as she left me to my meditations.

Perhaps it was Father Connolly, and no doubt he would call again to give Hannah religious instruction, to which the good priest had pro-

bably found some key, for he was a laborious and devoted pastor, according to his creed, with a large and poor parish, his part of which consisted chiefly of emigrant Irish. By the way, he was one of them, as his name imported; and though not from our part of Ulster, his native place was Donegal Bay, I believe; he knew our family history, and paid us particular attention. I had come to the conclusion that he must have been our visitor, after canvassing the subject more than it seemed worth, when I entered the manager's office on Monday morning, and started back involuntarily, as in Esthers' place, and manifestly looking over his book, I beheld Madame Palivez.

“ Good morning, Mr. La Touche,” she said, with the tone and manner of the bank lady; “ do you know if Mr. Esthers be within? I know he is not,” she continued, when I had made my bow, stammered out something in reply which was never clear to my mind, and shut the door. “ He goes to see a friend of his on Sunday afternoon, at least he went yesterday, and has not got back; the way is rather long. And now, young man, I don't know whether I ought to shake hands with you or not;” she extended her white hand as she spoke, and looked exactly as

she did when asking me to stay and dine with her. "How comes it, after making a league of friendship—an alliance offensive and defensive, as one may say, against the world—that you have never appeared at my back rooms in the bank, or my hermitage in the Park?" We were shaking hands still, and I could get out nothing but "Madame, you did not send for me."

"Do you wait to be sent for?" said she, laughing; "that may be friendship in this age and country, but it would not have passed for such in our ancient Greece."

"Madame, you will excuse me;" I felt myself wronged and misjudged, yet how hard it was to put the case in words—to express my own feelings on the subject.

"Perhaps I will; what is your excuse?" she said; "we were to be friends without pride or misunderstanding."

"I did not like to trespass upon you when you might have been otherwise engaged; our positions—what you very properly call our public lives—are so different. I was aware, though merely from appearances about your house in Curzon-street, which I sometimes pass, that you were much occupied with company, as most fashionable people are at this period of

the London season"—she was positively looking embarrassed, and that gave me courage to proceed—"I thought that when you wished to see me you would let me know, as you had the goodness to do before; and I thought it better to wait."

"You are more prudent than I am," she said, the embarrassment deepening into vexation; had the incompatibility of things at length occurred to her also? "but listen, we cannot talk here, you will come and see me at my hermitage in the Park this evening; there will be time enough after the bank closes; the way lies up by the stream and through the trees, you remember, and cannot miss it if you only keep to the left and follow its windings. Look at this, too," and she drew from her pocket a small brass key, of old-fashioned but strong workmanship, "a proof that I will not be the first to break our compact; take and keep it, it will admit you to my back rooms by the door in the churchyard wall, to my hermitage by the only gate it has: Calixi or any of my servants will tell you where I am, and, by the honour of old Greece, there will never be a 'not at home,' to you. Good-bye for the present." She shook hands with me once more, and left the

key in my fingers ; “ you will come this evening ? ”

“ If I am alive, Madame.” How was it that the promise to Rosanna passed out of my memory for the time ?

She had stepped to the door and opened it before the words were well out, and with a formal “ Good morning, Mr. La Touche,” which would have edified any clerk within hearing, swept along the passage, and I heard the inside key turned in her door of retreat.

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THE HIDDEN SIN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE HIDDEN SIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE VISIT TO THE HERMITAGE.

CHARITABLE souls will say that I differ from the most of mankind; but fibs and falsehoods, whether black or white, have always gone grievously against my grain. I never could tell one neatly, even to a woman, however necessary it might be; and the fear of having to do something of the kind kept me away from Bolton-row that Monday evening, and sent me off, as soon as business would permit, to the west-end of Kensington Park, with the weight of a lover's broken promise hanging like a mill-stone about the neck of my conscience, which after the manner of men, was enabled to support it, with the help of half a score of apologies. I had

forgotten to tell Madame in time, and could not disappoint her now.

I would run over and see Rosanna some time to-morrow: it might be as well to give sister Sally space to recover from her Saturday evening's performance; and, better than all, I knew from past experience there was no lasting indignation to be expected. I could always talk Rosanna over or into anything, and always would: it was one of the links that held me in her thrall. I know the like has a similar power over most men; and whether it be a bond to hold good against life's wear and tear or not, I leave to better judges.

I had looked at my brass key at intervals throughout the day, as a new-made chamberlain might look at his gold one. There were opportunities, for Esthers did not appear till the forenoon was pretty well spent; then he slipped into the office as quietly as he had done before: wherever those absences took him, he was not desirous that they should attract observation.

It was both my policy and inclination to suit the manager exactly in this respect. The blue-beard chamber in my own life kept me from prying overtly into other people's, but I pri-

vately remarked that Esthers had come back as thoughtful and preoccupied as from his former trip; that, in like manner, he pretended to be deeply engaged with the bank books, while merely sitting over them, and occasionally muttering to himself about one's own turn; that towards evening he brightened up again, took special occasion to let me know that his absence was entirely on Madame's service, business of great importance being hinted at; and Esthers was not only himself, but more civil and communicative than usual; yet there was never a word of his friendly doings to Mr. Forbes, or his gossip about the Russian Prince.

We were playing our respective games; I felt sure that Esthers knew nothing of mine, and doubtless he thought the same; but somehow, thinking of him brought to my recollection, when just passing Tyburn Gate, that if I went straight up the path by the stream, and Helen Forbes happened to be sitting by the bay window doing her needlework, and looking out for Madame Palivez, she might wonder, and watch, and surmise where I was going. Madame did not want me to be seen, and neither did I; our public lives were different, and my heart was true to the spirit as well as the letter of our

compact; so I crossed Hyde Park to the Kensington side, went down the Hammersmith Road, passed Holland House and lawn, then the parade of Whig literature, skirted Holland Park, entered the Norland one by a path which is now a street of houses thickly inhabited—I think they call it Prince's Road; it was a wild grassy glade among old trees at that time; the Norland and Kensington parks met there. Helen had told me it was a way Madame sometimes took, and I was resolved to find her villa.

My resolution was crowned with success. At some distance along the lane I saw the track of hoofs in the mossy grass—Zara had been there—and it led me through a narrower and more tangled path to the left, going deep into the heart of that ancient royal woodland, where the first George had done his last hunting, and was said to have seen the spectre of his long-imprisoned wife who died at the Castle of Zell, beckoning to him out of one of the darkest thickets.

My way was growing so narrow and tangled, that I thought I must be losing myself in the park, which was still of great extent, when suddenly it opened on a clear green space, a

forest dell it seemed, shut in by great trees, beyond which there was no seeing, but open to the evening sun, which, now almost on the edge of the horizon, cast broad gleams of golden light on the walls and windows of a small solitary house, which stood there silent, but sweet to look upon as a fairy bower. Its height was but two low stories; all round the lower was a verandah, all round the upper a balcony; the roof was slightly arched, and it had no chimney; some of the windows were stained glass, some were painted lattice-work. The house stood in the midst of a garden of flowers, which seemed to be indigenous; the most of them were known to my childhood, but such a wealth of bloom I never saw; there was nothing there but flowers, no fence, but a low green paling and a hedge of hawthorn, from which the white blossoms were still falling, the light pillars of the verandah, the railings of the balcony, the walls, the windows, and the very roof were wreathed with climbing roses, honey-suckle, and jessamine; and the whole was sheltered on the north and east by a high bank, or rampart of earth, clothed with luxuriant ivy, and planted with the tallest, thickest laurels I ever saw.

That was her villa, her hermitage—nobody

else could have planned or built the like ; but was there any living creature about it ? The thrush was singing his last upon the neighbouring trees, the earliest nightingale had commenced among the thick laurels her hymn to the summer night ; but I saw nobody, heard no human voice. The key had been given me, and I would try it, however ; I did try it on the one gate there was for entrance or egress, got easy admission, stepped up a white sanded walk, entered the verandah—it was paved with white marble, which the summer wind had strewn over with rose-leaves—saw a window, or rather glass door, half open ; it gave me entrance to a hall or outer room, also marble-floored, but that was mosaic, furnished only with a group of the Lares guarding an antique hearth, a kind of settle made of cedar and beautifully carved, a low-covered table before it, but nobody to be seen.

I turned out again ; there was a marble stair leading up from the verandah, the jessamine twining all along its banisters ; I ascended first to a vestibule, then into a room adjoining, the glass door of which also stood open ; the floor was of inlaid wood, polished and shining, the furniture like that of Madame's back rooms, as

she called them, but slighter, more summer-like and far less costly; and on one of the low sofas at the further end, half hidden by a great myrtle in full flower—for many such like shrubs grew in large vases ranged around the painted walls and in the balcony—there sat or rather reclined Madame Palivez herself, in a plain loose white dress, fastened with a purple ribbon, the heavy braids of her rich hair hanging free from net or pins, her hands folded in her lap, a half-open book lying by her side; and I discovered she was fast asleep.

I suppose in most dilemmas a man's first resource is a hem! I took to it instinctively on that occasion, having just taken time to notice how rigid and sternly resolved the otherwise beautiful face looked while she slept. Madame did not start, nor even seem surprised, but opened her eyes, passed her white hand over them, then extended it to me, with, "Welcome, my friend! you have found me sleeping after a long ride; perhaps the jessamine tells on one in this warm evening, or the weight of years begins to press down the eyelids in broad day. Is it not a curious fact that even in the East, where the heat makes it an universal custom, young people do not sleep so much in the day-

light as their elders? That's right, find yourself the best seat you can; I hope they are not all too low for you. Did you find the way easily up the stream?"

"I didn't come that way, Madame." What made me let it out? she comprehended the whole by one glance in my face.

"You wanted to avoid Mr. Forbes' window; his daughter sits there; good, industrious girl, always at needlework, many a time I see her looking after me. It is a dull life for a young person to lead in that solitary house; they see very little company, I believe; yet Mr. Forbes is rich, and nothing particular about the family." There was a keen and curious inquiry in her look.

"Nothing that I know of, but the early loss of his wife and two sons, and Scotch Calvinism," said I.

"Don't despise that, my friend: Calvinism is but Christian fatalism, the only faith which every age and all research confirms. Does that astonish you? perhaps you have not thought on the subject, yet it is one that must occur to every thinker."

"You believe in predestination, then?" said I

"Yes, in the ancient philosophic sense. The

inexorable, unalterable Fate, fixed for ever above all power, beyond all wisdom, independent of all merit, never to be avoided or overstepped, never to be accounted for or reasoned on, without justice, without mercy, and without change, seems to me, as it seemed to the thinkers of old on the shores of the Nile, the Ægean, and the Tiber, the one certainly, lying cold, dark, and immoveable at the root of all our belief, doctrines, and speculations, as the primeval rock lies beneath the cultivation, the graves, and the débris of the world. It was the Parcæ of the Greek tragedy, a threefold representation as governing the birth, the life, and the death of mortals. Probably from it came the idea of the Triad, which runs through all Eastern mythology, and has descended to its latest offshoots, the very troublesome creeds of Christendom. The old Fate has found place among them too, and to do the stiff Picard Calvin justice, he seemed to have the clearest understanding of it: that eternal election and reprobation of his comes the nearest to the classic notion, and are fitted most ingeniously into the Christian framework. I can't help thinking they gave strength to his system, as well as hardness, and helped him to found the rigid theocracy which held its own, and more, in

the watchmaking city for many a year against the whole of Catholic Europe. At least you will allow that the Calvinists of France and Holland showed a tougher courage, and passed through a fiercer ordeal than the Lutheran men of Germany and England.

“The same doctrines struck deep root in Scotland; they were fitted for the national mind, which may be narrow, but is never shallow. Calvinism fought a tough battle there, lived through it, and what is far more wonderful, has lived on in spite of religious peace, increasing in wealth and trade, and the prevalence of schools. Your friends the Forbes, and thousands of Scotch families at home and abroad, hold fast by the decrees from all eternity! Observe, it is not they alone that have made them serious and sober; there is something in the banker’s face that tells me he has had experience of a kind to confirm the faith he was reared in. I mean what I say,” she continued, in answer to my look of involuntary amazement; “there are experiences which prove the election and reprobation doctrines to be true, independent of divines with their formulas and texts.”

“What kind of experiences, Madame?”

“What thousands meet with, my friend. The

circumstances, the surroundings, the necessities all setting one way, like so many concurrent tides for good or for evil—no matter which, they are equally strong—generally strongest for the latter course—not to be turned, not to be run against, and sure to bear us on to their own inevitable goal, however opposed to our inclinations, our efforts, and our hopes.”

“I cannot believe in such doctrines,” said I, speaking plainly out my thoughts, for they had followed every word she uttered with a deeper and more personal interest than mere speculation could ever command. “This fixed, unalterable fate of yours, Calvin’s eternal decrees, and all the rest of it, leave no room for free will, and consequently none for accountability.”

“My friend,” and she smiled compassionately, “when you have inquired, observed, and experienced more, you will discover that the notion of free will among men is like that of liberty among nations—a thing much talked about, much sacrificed for, often dreamt of, but never realized. The deeper we search into life and its workings—social, domestic, and individual—the farther it recedes from us. Most men think themselves agents when they

are only instruments, None of us ever can, or ever could, do otherwise than we do."

"Is there no blame, no retribution, then?"

"There is plenty of both, my friend—particularly the first-mentioned. Is not the whole world blaming everybody who does not succeed? Hasn't it been going on in the same fashion, blaming away from one generation to another, since Adam was unlucky enough to eat that apple? And as for retribution, had not the Nemesis her altars, on which my ancestors offered sacrifices in the Athenian night to propitiate the goddess of darkness and revenge, that she might not come to levy her tribute off their houses? They have been long overturned, or given to other gods; but she reigns still; and we have made her more costly offerings in these Christian times than man ever made in her acknowledged temples. Ay, the Nemesis reigns still; there is revenge, but there is no justice, no prevention, no escape for the innocent. The retribution comes by fixed laws, which have no variation and no reasonableness in them—comes, but not in proportion to the guilt, not heaviest on the head of the wrong-doer. The corner-stone removed, no matter, by what power or for what purpose, brings down the tower on

innocent infancy as well as on guilty manhood. The ship goes to pieces with a Jonah on board, but honest hands and faithful hearts go with it. Yes, my friend, there is retribution and blame enough, but these are only other names for destiny."

"I will go farther than that with you," said I, feeling for the first time on equal terms; "I will allow that Jonah may swim safe to shore, while some far better man gets his inside place in the whale. Limited as you justly think my experience, it has been sufficient to let me know, by something like practical proofs, Madame, that our good and ill fortunes are not measured by our merits. To the worst and the best, the chances are probably pretty equal in this world. But is there not another life to adjust the balance:—the hereafter, to which wise men of all times and races—Confucius, Zoroaster, and Solon—have looked for the solution of the moral problems which still perplex us all, and the justice not to be expected on this side of the grave? Do not the conflicting creeds of mankind, which agree in nothing else come to one on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments?"

"They do, my friend, with a considerable

difference on the subjects of them ; for instance, according to your Roman teaching, the most dreadful doom may be expected for doing despite to a consecrated wafer : from my Greek instructors, a seat in the heaven may be reckoned on for the destruction of well-chiselled images, and the putting up of dingy daubs in their room. That is the agreement of creeds in the matter of final judgment. As for Zoroaster, Solon, and Confucius, time has left us but faint and fragmentary outlines of their philosophy much overlaid, and ill-reported too. It is probable that they taught the populace of their respective nations somewhat as you have stated ; so did sages since and before them—it was a useful dogma, and might help to keep the multitude in some sort of order—but did they not always think so, my friend ? I doubt if philosophers could. All things as far as our knowledge or investigation extends—and remember, there is no reasoning except on ascertained data, no seeing but the light we have got—all things, then, are governed by fixed laws, in the moral as well as the material world. The revolutions of both may be predicted and calculated with equal certainty ; what people call accidents in both are equally the product of unvarying rules.

Under given circumstances, certain virtues will prevail—so will fair weather ; and crimes may be counted on as surely as storms.”

What a stony, statuesque look her face took whilst she spoke ! In spite of the finely-moulded features and soft clear complexion, there was something positively repulsive in its hard, cold expression—something that chilled and terrified, but yet led me on with the discussion, as if I had a personal interest in it, and a discovery to make.

“ But are not those fixed laws the product of Divine wisdom, and is it to be imagined that the Divinity is not just and good ? ”

“ I know not,” she said, quickly ; “ the farther we search into Nature the more the Divinity recedes from us. Perhaps there are many powers equally supreme in their provinces, as my classic ancestors, believed. Perhaps there is only mind and matter, both subjects to necessity, as Plato thought ; or, more likely, the two eternal principles of the Manichæans—but here comes Marco with the coffee.”

The opportunity thus caught to turn the subject was given her by the entrance of an old Greek—nobody could have taken the man for anything else, though his beard was white, and

long enough to have served a Turkish dervish. It streamed down upon his breast; his hair, equally straight and snowy, flowed over his shoulders. He was tall and erect, and brought in a tray, with a service of plain white china on it, with more dignity than all the silent servants arranging gold and silver plate in those richly-furnished rooms behind the bank. Everything in her woodland villa was in striking contrast to what went on there and in Curzon-street; those were the residences of her wealth and fashion—here she lived with summer and simplicity; perhaps it was Madame's Arcadia.

“You are admiring Marco,” she said, when the old man had served us with the coffee and gone out; “he is a noble specimen of Greek age; handsome to the last—at least I think so—and without failure or infirmity, though now in his eighty-first year. Yes, you may wonder, but that man is Calixi's father; he was born in my family's service; his father and mother came with the Palivezi from Amsterdam, and rest in a Dublin church-yard. Their ancestors served mine in Eastern Russia; and Marco and his old wife, Zoe, are the guardians of my hermitage, and will suffer no other servants to wait on me here.”

While she spoke, it just crossed me, though not for the first time, how few female servants must be kept in her establishments. There were maids in Curzon-street; I had seen them looking out by chance from the attic and basement windows. Madame Oniga and her discreet subordinates looked after the necessities of the bank people; but in the lady-superior's rooms only men were to be seen, and here there were none but Marco.

“Does the old woman wait upon you, too?” I inquired, by way of a probe at that curious subject.

“No,” said Madame, stirring her coffee, and positively guessing my thought, “she manages domestic matters behind the scenes; it is an Asiatic custom, perhaps, but one that takes my fancy, to have only men-servants about me. Between ourselves, I have no great liking for women in general, neither had any of the Palivezi. Their restless curiosity, their love of gossip, their ready instrumentality to all sorts of men, and priests in particular, make them more troublesome than useful to the head of a house like ours. Of course one must have maids, but I keep as few as I can. Laugh if you like, my friend; it is all true, though not a chivalrous lesson for

a fine young man ; but we won't waste our time with the world's shams ; you know it as well as I do, or you will in time."

"Is it not a pity," said I, "that the education of women, both in Asia and Europe, should be so defective? For I presume that is the cause of the disqualifications you have mentioned, and many more."

"I don't think it is," said Madame ; "the cause lies far deeper—namely, in Nature. It is one of the fixed laws of which we have been talking ; ay, and a law of necessity too. Do you imagine women would ever do the duties Nature imposes on them, if they had the intellectual capacity of men? Would they be mothers and nurses, with all the lowering concomitants and wretched rewards of those offices? No, no, my friend ; the world would come to its close, or rather never would have gone forward. No schooling, no training can make them other than they are, differing of course with climates and ages, but still in the back-ground, as the necessity of things requires."

"It is not an encouraging doctrine for those who have hopes of human progress," said I. "If the mothers, and consequently first teachers of mankind, must be always gossips and instru-

ments, what chance is there for their sons to become wiser or better?"

"Once again, I know not," said Madame. "But doubtless that is one of the causes which make human progress such a very circuitous affair."

"Yes, Madame,"—let me observe I did not intend to flatter—"but I think there are some proofs in existence against your fixed law. What do you account yourself?"

"Simply an exception,"—she spoke as coolly as if it had been about the coffee-cups—"there are such to every rule. There is no law of nature without them; they also exist by laws. It was my destiny to be one of them, and being such, can never be the work of favourable stars."

"Is it then your opinion that you would have been happier without the better intellect or capacity which you think an exception to the ordinary rate of women?"

I felt the question was too much of a home-thrust the moment it was uttered, but she looked me quietly in the face, and said:

"I cannot tell; at the worst, it was only part of my ill-luck."

“Your ill-luck, Madame?”

“Yes, my friend. Did you never hear of a person rich and unlucky? What about the Fates we have just spoken of? What about the election and reprobation—having to do the thing one hates and shrinks from, having the memory of its like done long ago, to darken one’s days, and mingle with one’s dreams? Lucien, Lucien,”—she had never called me by my name before—“you know not what terrible work those *Parcæ* do in the dark places of life; what fearful threads they spin for us, and leave us no escape but by using their scissors.” She was wringing her hands and looking so desperately miserable, that without knowing what I did I sprang to my feet and was at her side in an instant. But the next she had recovered herself by a sudden and powerful effort; the face grew calm, even careless; whilst she motioned me to my seat, and said, as if nothing more particular had passed—“You and I shall never agree in our views except to differ, I believe; but as for the education question, trust me you will not think so much of it when you are ten years married.”

It was an instinctive sympathy, and not the

hope of surprising her secret, that made me rise and rush to her side, and though Madame had checked herself, from pride or prudence—I never could be sure which was strongest in that woman—she evidently knew and did justice to my motives. Her eye rested kindly, almost gratefully, on me. How tender and confiding that glance could become for one who had spoken out such bold opinions,—not with the weakness of the sex to which she belonged, and despised so cordially, but, as it seemed to me, with the feminine element, so called for want of a better name, the feeling, the sentiment, inseparable from all imaginative characters. Her thoughts were not with her words; neither were mine, though I answered,

“I don’t know what I may think when I am ten years married, but Heaven forbid that my companion for that space of time should be one of the kind you have described so graphically as instruments and gossips.”

“If I did say so, those terms include a large portion of creation’s fairer part,” said Madame, laughing.

She was herself again, but we had come nearer to each other by some miles, if mind-

distance can be so measured, and could never more fall back to our former remoteness.

“No doubt it does; but how could a man think of spending his life in such company?”

“There would not be much pleasure or profit in it, certainly, if the gossip and instrumentality were at your expense; but might they not be turned to your benefit? if not, remember it will be your own fault. Take my advice, Lucien, it is that of an older observer, and observation serves us sometimes as well as direct experience. Take care to secure the affections and the respect, perhaps I ought to say the reverence, of the woman you wed. Yes, it may be very true that any sort of reverence is a good deal beyond your merits—it is beyond that of most men,” said Madame, answering my amused look—“but if you can get some simple, proper, house-keeping girl to think you the greatest man in all creation—the most worthy to be attended, cooked for, and listened to—you will ensure a happy home in the ordinary sense of that word. Never mind intellect and education; they are not wanted for getting

ready a good dinner, or warming one's slippers. The nursery can be kept clean and noisy without them; the shirt-buttons can be put on, the holes in the stockings darned, the children taught their catechism, the maids scolded into good behaviour, the back-parlour kept in good order, and the tea-parties properly managed. These are the tangible things which make life run smoothly on in the domestic groove."

"Very necessary things, no doubt," said I—"but is there nothing more wanted in one's life companion? The stockings might be darned, the dinners cooked, and the catechism taught in the most unexceptionable manner, and the unfortunate man for whom all was done so properly, be as solitary as I have been in the old bachelor's boarding-house in Baltimore. What pleasure or profit could there be in such a life? What real attachment could one have to a woman with whom one could not exchange a single thought except on the quality of the mutton or the amount of the Christmas bill, suppose she did think one the greatest man in all creation, or warmed one's slippers as dutifully as the evening fell?"

CHAPTER II.

REVELATIONS.

“MEN were deceivers ever,” says the old song; strange to say, involuntary deceivers sometimes. I had no intention, no cause for playing the hypocrite to Madame Palivez just then; yet, while I said this and a great deal more about the bond of common sentiments and the companionship of mind, I was perfectly aware that between my plighted bride Rosanna and myself there was not a link of taste or thought, not a sentiment or aspiration in common. How well I maintained my position, nevertheless; how earnestly I argued for the absolute indispensability of kindred tastes and modes of thinking in married life—ay, and believed what I was saying; it was the voice of the doubt regarding our future which had crossed me

many a time in Rosanna's presence, though I knew it not, and went on waxing more and more eloquent on my subject, till Madame stopped me with,

“ My dear fellow, men's wives are not always their companions, nor intended to be so in the sense of which you speak. The domestic offices require far different qualifications from those which gild the social hour or brighten up the converse of intellectual friendship. Believe me, it is nothing but the inconsistency of human selfishness that expects the union of such incompatible things. It is that makes the homes of Europe, and particularly those of England, so full of small disquiet and petty strife. The wife's world is not kept distinct enough from that of the husband. It is naturally narrower, and its bounds cannot be much enlarged with safety ; so the man has pressed down to it, the requisitions of the family absorb his life, domestic necessities and proprieties force everything else out of their way, they make continual inroads on all social liberty, lay continued embargoes on thought ; the art, the literature, and the intellect of the nation are befamilied, and made to fit into the corners of nurseries and back-parlours, and a general dwindling and dullness, ex-

cept in matters merely mechanical, is the evident consequence. My Greek ancestors knew better how to manage life. With them the house and family were necessary, but private institutions, which did not go abroad with the man to festive board and philosophic school. Thought was free, art was glorious, and life was large and liberal. The domestic world had rights, immunities, and enjoyments of its own, on which those of the outer circle did not trespass. The matron reigned over maid and distaff without fear of being behind the times; kept her proprieties, and fulfilled her duties. — The master of a house did not lose his friends, his tastes, and his social existence when he happened to get married. I am talking a good deal on this subject, you see, because I have heard that you are about to enter into the happy state, and also because I understand you have chosen wisely, Lucien, foolishly as you talk, to be put off the scent, I suppose,” and she laughed again with all her heart.

What was it that made me sit confounded and silent for almost a minute? It was natural that Madame should have known my engagement to Rosanna, for Esthers knew it; yet her plain speaking on the subject took me by surprise, and I could only stammer out—

“I hope I have chosen wisely; but indeed I did not mean to put you off at all.”

“Well, I thought you did, partly because I was told that your intended, Miss Joyce—is not that her name?—was quite the simple sort of girl who would think you the greatest man, and all the rest of it. Very domestic, is she not—likely to be an excellent housekeeper, and very pretty into the bargain?”

Madame was quite serious now, and I had to give a serious answer.

“Rosanna Joyce is pretty, and we have been engaged for some time. About her housekeeping abilities I am not so certain; she has been in a manner brought up by an elder sister, a rather eccentric and not very orderly person.”

“Oh, she is anything but orderly. I know something about that Sally Joyce—in fact, about the whole family. The father, and afterwards the son, was employed in our bank when it was in Dublin. I forget how many years they served us honestly and faithfully; but we had no use for the son, Sally’s brother, I mean, when the house removed to London, and I thought it my duty to give the family a sort of pension; it is bestowed on them jointly, and will descend from the one to the other: Jeremy and Rosanna may

come to share it between them, as Sally's life is not a certain one, but in the meantime she has the first right over it. As you say, Sally brought up her younger brother and sister; they were left early orphans, and she was many years their senior."

"Can you tell me who Sally's mother was?" said I; "she boasts of her as having been a lady."

"Sally's mother was the daughter of a Jew money-lender of the name of Reubens," said Madame, without the slightest change of look; "your family knew something of him, I think—most business people in Ireland did. He lent money, and he made money; but, unlike a Jew, he contrived to lose it again; indeed, if it had not been for our house—but I say so in confidence—the old man must have ended his days in the Marshalsea, as many a better man did. The Palivezi were friends to him first and last; perhaps you will say they had some right; for his daughter Esther—a large, handsome, full-blooded Jewess, who got no education or schooling of any kind, but the general impression that she was to be an heiress, that her father was a miser, and it was her privilege to spend as much as she could—became the fair friend—mistress is your

English term for it—of my uncle, Alexis Palivez, the only one of our house who lived and died unmarried. Mr. Esthers is their child; according to Jewish custom he takes his mother's name, though in the Saxon form, and of course the house provides for him; but by special agreement some time before my uncle's death, they separated, and she married our Irish clerk, Jeremy Joyce. The son is called after him, and our friend Sally was the only child of that marriage—born, not to the inheritance of her mother's beauty, but to that of a peculiar and unsafe constitution, both of body and mind, which may have been the result of a great affection for strong waters which the poor woman took some time before she and my uncle parted, and continued in, to the shortening of her own days."

"Esthers the half-brother of Sally Joyce!" said I, as soon as the astonishment would let me speak. "How strange that neither of them should ever have hinted the fact to me?"

"It was owing to a rule of our house," said Madame with immense composure. "No illegitimate connexions are ever permitted to claim relationship with the Palivezi; but as we are friends, and you are engaged to the younger sister, I thought it better to let you know.

Remember, Sally's mother had nothing to do with Rosanna's, except as her predecessor in old Jeremy's heart and home. By-the-bye, he was not much older than yourself when they were married. Come now, what are you in such a brown study about?"

"Just wondering what brought the Joyces from America." I could speak plainly to her now. "Rosanna told me it was by your advice they went."

"So it was; and it might have been well if they had remained there. Sally, poor soul! is constitutionally troublesome, like most women with strong muscles and weak brains. Her absence would have been a great relief to her brother. Of course, it was only on his account that I took any notice of their family arrangements, but the Atlantic between them was too quiet a state of things for Sally to permit any longer; besides, she had her sister's *fiancé* to look after and keep steady, I presume. Lucien, my friend, don't be so ready to kindle up at a jest. I know the looking after was unnecessary, whatever that disturbed and capricious mind might imagine. There is faith and constancy in you, if ever they were in man; it was the brave look of them in your face that first drew my mind to

you before I dreamt of you doing me such good service.”

How nobly sincere the woman looked—above disguise or conventionality. The words seemed to come from her heart, and went to my head like new wine; but she left me no time to answer her.

“I know you will keep true and loyal to the choice your own heart made and sacrificed so much for. It was bravely done, Lucien, and foolishly too. There is no love, no beauty worth the loss of wealth and position—at least, people think so at my years, and an old woman will speak out her mind; but it was a brave, romantic kind of folly, such as we don’t meet with every day—such as every man is not capable of—such as one dreamt of in one’s youth; and therefore I respect it. Mr. O’Neil himself told me the particulars in a letter, poor man! but he was angry about it, and no wonder. Lucien, your uncle is of a good family, and so are you. But the choice was made, and I know you will abide by it honestly and courageously, without regret for the loss or shrinking from the consequences. We never could agree on the matter of the heavy sacrifice—I mean your uncle’s good graces and testament; but leaving that

aside as a settled question, I think you chose wisely as to the woman. I have seen Rosanna Joyce; she is just the sort of girl to make a good, useful, manageable wife. Her domestic education may not have been of the most regular kind under Sally's governance, but she is not too old to learn better; the instruction and example of your friends the Masons, or even of their brother-in-law, Watt Wilson—he is great in house-keeping, I understand—would do wonders for her. And you are wondering how I happen to know so much of these people. Oh, my fine young man! a lonely, loveless, graceless life like mine affords great opportunities for studying one's neighbours of all classes. In short, I think you may marry with a very fair chance of happiness, as that article goes among us; but there is one provision absolutely necessary for its security, and that is to get your excellent sister-in-law—why does that startle you? I mean Sally Joyce—fixed somewhere at a proper distance; and remember, the farther off the better. If she could be persuaded to go back to Dublin, or the county Mayo—the native seat of the family, I believe; or if—you will set me down for a hardened sinner, I fear—her head went a little further off the balance she might be placed with

advantage to herself and everybody else in some private, well-managed asylum. I should take care that the charges of her sojourn there would not fall on you."

Her eyes were fixed on my face with a look hard, keen, piercing and as cold as steel. She was as calm as one of the marble vases. She was speaking entirely for my interest—advising, as it were, out of pure friendship; but the ragged man, with his hoarse growl and long knife, turned up in my memory as she spoke. I knew it was not on Esthers' account that she had taken notice of their family arrangements, and I knew that it was not on mine that she advised Sally's removal to a proper distance, or a private well-managed asylum. For all the wealth she owned—for all I had sacrificed, as she said, so foolishly—I could not have put those thoughts in words, or asked her the direct question, "What interest have you in getting rid of Sally Joyce?" But some instinct—for it could have been nothing else—prompted me to look her fairly in the face, and say—

"Madame Palivez, was it you who purchased the annuity for my grand-aunt and sister?"

"It was, Lucien," she said, with no appearance of being taken by surprise; "though I did

not wish you to think that I had done so. Remember, it was not intended for any form of recompense; but I knew your family circumstances, I believed in your constancy, and I did myself the great pleasure of removing the only obstacle which stood between you and the fulfilment of your engagement. Let me hope that you will recollect our compact of friendship sufficiently to give me no thanks or acknowledgments; allow the matter to rest as if it were known only to Messrs. Kelly and Carson, and go on your way to domestic peace and comfort. But you know what an old woman's curiosity is; so please to tell me—when do you propose finishing the little business?"

I cannot remember in what words I answered; they must have been rather vague, for my mind was in a hazy turmoil of conflicting thoughts; but I got them shoved aside for the time, and by a few more questions Madame made out and highly approved of my prudent arrangements in the matter of making Rosanna acquainted with my aunt and sister, and seeing if there was any possibility of the parties living agreeably together. She seemed to enter at once into my feelings on the subject of keeping these only relations with me.

“It is wise and worthy of you, Lucien. Your poor old aunt is too near the final removal, by all appearance—for I have seen her—to get well established in another home; and your sister has qualities in her, or I am mistaken, too rare and good to be parted with. If Rosanna and she can fall into each other’s ways, and I think they will, you will have in the one exactly what is wanting in the other, and so build a treble bulwark against the tides and storms of life. It is well planned, and I hope will be well executed, my friend. But it grows late, and there was one special reason for which I wished to see you this evening. I am leaving town—leaving England. How short or long my absence may be, I cannot say. The affairs of our house require my presence in Russia. I will not remain there for the winter, if possible; it is the only climate I have any dread of. My return may be very soon, perhaps at the beginning of autumn; but you have the key I gave you; call and inquire at the end of a month if you do not see me here; or at the back rooms in Broad-street. My servants will give you an honest answer. And there was another thing I wanted to say to you.

You go to the Forbes' mostly on Saturday evenings. It was an old friendly arrangement made before you knew me. I have been the cause of your breaking through it once; not a good turn, Lucien, for they are worthy people and true friends to your family, though some darkening shadow has fallen upon their lives. Yes, I know there has, and it is that as well as the note she takes of me which gives me such an interest in that poor, plain, sober-looking girl. There is strange worth in her, too, something that makes one half willing to believe in prayers and Bible reading in spite of one's knowledge and reason. And sometimes I have caught myself wishing—I won't say what, on your account, Lucien."

"On my account, Madame? Miss Forbes is an heiress, and I am a clerk."

"I know you are, and I know she is. I also know that Helen Forbes is not by a long way so pretty as Rosanna Joyce; but you go there on Saturday evenings, and you ought to go; but Sunday is their penitential day. I should like to know what Forbes has to do special penance for. Let that evening be sacred to my service, if you have no better use for it. Seeing Rosanna and doing duty at

home will be taxes enough on the rest of your leisure.”

I agreed to the arrangement, as I did to everything she proposed. We had some talk about the judiciousness of my introduction scheme. The expediency of getting Sally and her brother Jeremy, for he was now included, out of London—in short, anywhere far enough off—was once more insisted on. I agreed to it with all my heart, but could not see how it was to be effected; on which she passed from the subject to the surrounding flowers—to the summer night which now hung over us, soft, dewy, and starlit, filling the open room with woodland scents and the long gushes of the nightingale’s song.

“It sings there among the laurels,” said Madame, “as it sang in the Delphian groves where Apollo gave his oracles, and unlucky man had a chance of seeing Pan and his nymphs. The song has not changed like the creeds and nations; it belongs to nature, to beauty, and to poetry. My native Greece is a ruined tomb or temple this many an age; but Philomel still laments among the laurels, and fills the summer night with the

story of her woes. Good night, my friend," she added, as I rose with a sudden recollection that it must be past midnight. Madame did not appear to have any timepiece, or any use for the like in her villa. "Good-night, and good-fortune go with you! Among many more you have got the two virtues that help to bring it—prudence and courage. They also help to make you the friend I want, if such can be found at all. Don't forget to call and inquire after me; and once more, good-night."

She clasped my hand as she had done in the evening we made the compact. I said good night, and wished her a good journey in the usual form; but when at the door the fact that she was going away struck me so forcibly, that I turned to take another look. There she sat, leaning back on the sofa; her hands clasped in her lap, her head bowed, the long braids of jetty hair getting loose and streaming over her long but beautiful moulded neck. The woman looked weary, as if her strength and spirits had been exhausted with the wear of the long day. She was not thinking of me, yet my backward glance pleased her, and she said, smiling—the very soul of summer was in that smile of hers

—“ We shall meet again, Lucien ; I will return in good time to congratulate you and Rosanna.”

At the garden gate I found old Marco, waiting with a lantern to show me my way home through the park. It was the shortest way now I took, for the Forbes' must be all asleep for hours. Nobody could see me from the bay window, ; there was the friendly shade of night always to be trusted in, and along a grassy path winding through the trees, the old man lighted me to the very spot where I had seized the uplifted arm and hurled down the ragged man. From that point it widened, went straight down the hill-side, and my way was clear. I told Marco so, wished him good night, thanked him for his guidance, and assured him I should easily find the path in future. The old man responded with a courteous gravity which might have befitted an ancient knight ; but stepped back from the silver I thought it my duty to offer him, with a determined bow, and—“ The signor will excuse me for assuring him that the Pali-vezi always pay their servants.”

CHAPTER III.

A STRUGGLE BETWEEN LOVE AND DUTY.

IT went to my conscience to see the clock pointing at half-past one in the morning, when Rhoda, who had been sitting up alone till she caught the sound of my step in the silent street, softly opened the door of No. 9, and admitted me without knocking; but my good sister looked tired and troubled.

“I knew you were seeing Rosanna, and sat up for you, Lucien; but is it fashionable in America to stay visiting young ladies so late?”

“No, Rhoda; and I would not have stayed but for particular reasons—the like will happen sometimes; but don’t vex yourself about it. When I am late, never sit up for me; I’ll take the latch-key in future.”

“Oh, I am not vexed a bit; I mended your wristbands and darned your socks; and I know

you'll never do anything onbecoming; but, Lucien, I don't think my aunt is well to-day. She didn't get up till the afternoon, and went to bed again early in the evening. I never saw nobody so altered; she prays so much and don't scold at all; nothing sets her on as it used to do, since that fright she got with the lightning. She has been talking a good deal about Rosanna and you, quite kind-like, with not a bit of a grumble; which is not her common, you know. In course I told her that the Joyces had come from America, and that you were over seeing them; and she said nothing at all but 'the Lord's will be done!' Lucien, I am afraid what she said to us on the walk home from the Masons is going to come true. It was just how the rest went, changing so much before they were called away; and the fretfullest of them that was poor Alice—you don't mind her, maybe—turned the quietest. Lucien, I am afeard Miss Livey won't be long with us;" and the tears stood in Rhoda's eyes.

"Well, Rhoda, she is an old woman, and we must all die sometime; but there is no certainty in these things—Miss Livey may outlive you and me. Good night, and get to bed like a good girl."

My sister cast a look of surprise up the stairs after me; the words might have sounded cold and queer to her. I went to my own room, but not to bed; sleep to my eyes was an impossibility that night. How many sleeps we lose before the long one comes! I opened the window and sat down by it.

It was at the back of the house, and overlooked pleasant meadows, with tall trees and green hedgerows, on which the starlight glistened and the light wind whispered among the leaves. Dewy and fragrant those airs of the summer night played round my temples, but could not reach or cool the fever that throbbed within. I had made a terrible discovery—one which no after-chance could effectually hide from me.

Like Adam after his fall, my eyes had been opened to see the precipice over which I had slipped, and the depth that still lay before me. The knowledge had come late but suddenly, as such knowledge always comes. My way down the hill-side, and through the sleeping village homeward, was not ten minutes' rapid walk; yet in that space there was made clear to me—was it the deceitfulness of the human heart that kept me from knowing earlier?—that I was en-

gaged to one woman and fallen in love with another.

Ay, fallen in love—there is no form better than that old rustic phrase to express those woful mistakes or mischances, which prove, to the best and wisest among us, that their hearts are not their own to keep or give away.

Madame Palivez had never treated me in a manner to flatter my pride, vanity, or self-esteem. The friendship she had offered was one not to be acknowledged before the world—not thought of till I had been of signal service to her. If it were friendship—it was nothing warmer, easily as men deceive themselves on that point—I knew, in the very depths of my nature, that the woman did not care for me except as a useful, humble friend—humble companion, rather—to whom she spoke what it pleased her to utter of notions and opinions not proper to promulgate in Mayfair and Belgravia. She had approved my choice, and applauded my constancy to another, with a sincerity I could not doubt, though the applause sounded like a ghastly mockery in my ears.

With her own hand she had given me the means of fulfilling my engagement with one of the connection not allowed to claim relationship

with the Palivez. She had predicted better things than I ventured to hope of Rosanna and our domestic life. She had also set the relation between us in a light by which I could not have looked upon it once, which, whether false or true—and I cannot settle that with myself to this day—was not consonant with the mind or manners of home-loving England.

She had shown, or allowed me to see, that there were unexplained objects underlying her friendship; there might be one in marrying me to Rosanna—there was one in getting rid of her sister; the hard, keen glance with which she spoke of the private, well-managed asylum, and the recollections it called up, haunted me like a warning dream. The notes of the Palivezi bank had bought the annuity for my aunt and sister—the blood-money, as poor Miss Livey called it; and with that thought came back the growl of the ragged maniac, “You murdered him, you sorceress.”

It was an impossibility to believe that Madame had aught to do with the disappearance of my lost brother. True, the bank had been in Castle-street, where he was last seen; but where was the motive?—where was the probability? I couldn't have believed in one if

it had been proved to exist ; yet, in spite of her sunny smile and lovely eyes, an impression had crept into my mind—like oozing waters, coming by drops, but not to be barred out—that some taint of crime clung to her and hers.

They were bold, bad doctrines those which she had preached to me concerning fate and necessity—subversive of all moral obligation, repugnant to my own convictions, and especially dangerous to unstable and inexperienced youth. Yet, against my better judgment, in spite of principles and inward warnings, there seemed to be a leaven of dark truth in them, for I loved Madame Palivez.

She was my senior by I knew not how many years, and still more so in knowledge and thought ; it may be hard to account for, but I hold that these are powerful causes of leading men into captivity, particularly when accompanied by such singular beauty as hers.

We had not met often—perhaps there was a charm in that, too ; it was not her position, not her surroundings, not her wealth—from these there might have been liberation ; but, woe is me ! it was the woman I loved—the woman who did not and could not care for me. Did she ever care for anybody ?—was it in her

nature? I could not tell; but I felt certain—it was the only certainty I had about her—that I was not the man.

And then the girl who loved and trusted me, to whom I was bound by honour and conscience—my own free choice, for whom I had sacrificed prospects and position! She was waiting for me in the miserable attic, with that elder sister—justly described as constitutionally troublesome—with all the weariness of hope deferred, and the faithful confidence so often expressed by that low, soft whisper, “Lucien, I could trust you to the end of the world; I know you will never forsake me.”

What ashes of shame and sorrow the remembrance of it flung on my head now! That very evening I had disappointed her, and gone at Madame’s call. It was a case beyond explanation—beyond retrieval; the bondage into which my heart had fallen it never could break through.

But the duty was clear. In spite of her arguing for the Fates, I felt myself an accountable being and a free agent, as far as the choice of right or wrong. That duty, with God’s help, I would do; fulfil my promise to Rosanna, now that every obstacle was removed; make

her a good and faithful husband ; valuing, if I could not return her affections, and never allowing her to know that my heart had wandered to another.

It was a resolution hard to make and hard to keep, for it involved giving up all association with Madame Palivez. Being honest in my determination, I knew that her society—private and unacknowledged as it was to be—could not be retained with safety to my own or to Rosanna's peace.

Yet how was it to be given up? how was the state of the case to be explained to her? I shrunk from the prospect of it; yet given up our friendship must be. There were a thousand reasons that made it unsafe, unadvisable for me, had Rosanna never existed.

The woman did not, could not care for me or my foolish love. I was a man, come to man's estate; not nurtured in an easy school, nor given to womanish ways; yet that thought made me bow my head on the window-sill, and weep there like a child. I looked up with something like shame, and dashed away the tears, for another day was breaking. The whiteness of the early dawn was already flushed by the regal sunrise; I heard the lark

going up to heaven with his song as I had heard it in the morning when her life was saved : another day for work, for duty, for brave resolves and honest striving, had come ; and I rose with it, determined to do my part of them, and act as became a man.

I went to business punctually that day, and worked with more than usual exactness. Esthers must have thought there was something particular on my mind, for he took opportunities to observe me in his stealthy manner, and made efforts to draw me out, but did not succeed. I had been warned of the man from the earliest dawn of our acquaintance ; the knowledge that he was Sally Joyce's half-brother did not lessen that warning. The Joyces had kept the fact from me, but Madame Palivez had explained the why and wherefore ; and I thought it more generous, perhaps more prudent, to continue in apparent ignorance of it, even with Rosanna.

I went to see her in the evening, and was received with smiles : no reproach had the poor girl for my broken appointment. Sally had got over her fits, and Jeremy told me he was to get a situation next week in Mr. Forbes' bank. " So much for Esthers' important intelligence,"

thought I. If he did wish his semi-relations at a distance, there was no want of intimacy and service between them. Jeremy would form another link to the Forbes, their house and business; but what was that to me? I had my own duties to do, and should be glad to see Rosanna's brother provided with a clerkship; yet it was a strange and not comfortable idea to find my own life so much interwoven with the meshes of other people's private management.

I saw the house in Curzon-street shut up as if its season were over, and reproached myself for looking at it. I put the brass key away in the corner of my desk, resolving never to use it, never to call at back-rooms or villa if I could help it; and the form of a letter wherein to declare my reasons and wishes for breaking up our compact, and seeing each other no more, was earnestly endeavoured after, but could not be accomplished. I tried hard, and I was resolved to forget her, as my only chance of safety and peace; but through the work of the day and the dreams of the night, through my dry chats with Esthers and my seeings of Rosanna, the tones of her voice, the looks of her eyes, the snowy arms as I had seen them last under the loose muslin sleeves; the jetty hair loosening

from its braids ; the full, fine form, so graceful, so careless in its movements ; the words, the thoughts she had uttered—came back upon me like so many spells. I could get rid of them in the streets, or when deeply engaged in bank business ; but at home or alone—and, strange to say, more particularly with Rosanna—they returned continually.

I remember admiring a piece of needlework she was doing by way of conversation, and all the while thinking of Madame's hands, and what a contrast they were to hers—for my bride-elect was not fortunate in that department. I remember taking her out for walks, and feeling heartily tired of talking to her about passing trifles. It was worse to talk of anything else, for I knew she did not understand me, and never would. What a great gulf had opened between us since the moonlight evenings when we walked and talked together in the outskirts of Baltimore ! Rosanna listened to me then, and that was sufficient ; but I had listened to one since, and what she would have answered or thought on every subject we spoke of, came up to my mind when the poor girl was saying, " Goodness me ! and I am sure I don't know."

I remember taking her to Covent Garden, where the Kembles were in full force. But I had heard plays and actors artistically discussed; I had some inkling of taste and judgment myself. Rosanna looked as pretty in her small finery, as flushed and fluttered with delight to find herself actually in a theatre, as she had looked at the Baltimore plays; but the wonder and the pleasure which had once charmed me were now childish, if not silly. It was evident that the men in the pit and the ladies in the boxes occupied her attention much more than the stage; and when I looked round from Kemble's great scene of King John suggesting the murder to Hubert, I found her yawning behind her pink fan, and saying "Isn't that wonderful?" as she caught my eye.

The duty was hard, but I went through with it; it was Madame Palivez that made Rosanna so uninteresting. The girl was what she had ever been; and yet, in spite of my utmost efforts, her deficiency served to keep the bank lady in my memory; and while still determined to hold fast by honour and conscience, and fulfil my engagement to the poor girl whose affections I had won, the conviction grew upon me hour by hour that in her society I never could

be happy, and that Madame's solution was the only one for my domestic difficulty. My intended wife could not be my companion. There was no mode of life for me but the classical one she had recommended, in which "the house and family were necessary but private institutions—not to go abroad with the man to festive board or philosophic school." But I was not a classical character; my nature was domestic as that of the most Anglo-Saxon man. If solitary at home, I must be solitary for life. There was no going abroad for companionship. Where I found it, there my heart would make its home; and I knew they could be only in Broad-street or the villa.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS LIVEY'S TIME IS COME.

I WORKED hard against wind and tide, and there were household circumstances that helped to keep me in that sober course. Rhoda had remarked the change in my poor old grand-aunt; and I soon began to see that her fears were well founded. Miss Livey declined, day by day, from the evening of the thunderstorm; it was soon plain that her prediction of never walking with us again would be fulfilled. She gradually rose later and later—became more and more quiet, and even gentle—gave her mind up to religious duties—at length did not leave her bed at all, and kept her rosary constantly in her fingers. The doctor, for whom we sent, said it was a decay of nature; and then inquired if she had met with any accident, or got any sudden shake. “No, doctor,” said Miss Livey, “no-

thing of the kind worth mentioning ; but I am near fourscore, and my time is come."

On that idea her mind settled, with a composure which was strange to see—in one whose tempers had been so disquieting all her long life. The change which Rhoda described so graphically had come over her ; perhaps it was a family characteristic—such things appear in death as well as in life. I had reproached myself when she leant on my arm that evening for bearing badly with Miss Livey's humours, and thinking the old woman so much of a trial at times.

I did my best to make up for it in those last days of hers ; and she seemed to take more kindly to me than she had ever done. "Is Lucien come home yet?" was her often repeated question as the evenings drew on ; and her old wrinkled face would brighten up when I came into the room. Rhoda had been always affectionate to her, and Miss Livey seemed to understand that better than formerly ; but to the youngest child of the family, whom she had nursed and petted in his infancy—whom she had thrust away from home and friends in the fierceness that came on her in that time of ruin—the old woman's heart seemed to turn with a

loving confidence, which I knew myself not to deserve. "Your sweetheart has come from America, Lucien," she said, with a cheerful look, one day; "you'll bring her to see me, won't you, before I go? I should like to give you both my blessing; and you'll do as becomes a decent family, Lucien—put some crape on your hat for me, and don't just get married till it's worn a decent time."

The respectability of her family was poor Miss Livey's first, and continued to be her last care, sorely as she had been disappointed in it. I promised that everything should be properly managed, and no wedding take place till the time of mourning expired. "But there is no use in talking of that," I added, as a matter of course; "you'll get better, aunt, and dance at our wedding, I'll warrant."

"No, dear, I am going; but you'll bring her to see me?" said Miss Livey.

I brought her accordingly: there was a good deal of trouble in keeping Sally at home; her company would have been no acquisition to the sick room, and I did not wish the old woman to be disturbed with some of her outbursts. She was staved off, and Rosanna brought. How quietly and kindly Miss Livey received the girl

concerning whom she had scolded and grumbled from Antrim to London! My intended bride behaved with great propriety; indeed, she was more to my mind by my aunt's bedside than ever I had found her since we parted in Baltimore. Rosanna was naturally gentle; the strange family, and the sight of sickness, subdued her to the melancholy point. Rhoda also took to her kindly; I felt that they would be good friends—there would be no necessity to part with a sister my heart was growing to; the one of my household with whom there was danger of disputation was rapidly going down to the Valley of the Shadow. The fact brought us all nearer to that common lot; and in the sobering light which it cast on life, my duty was still clearer, and seemed more easy to do.

Rosanna came to see my aunt almost every evening, in the same quiet, kindly fashion. They talked little; Miss Livey did not speak much to anybody now, and never made a remark on her intended niece, except when she was gone after their first introduction, and I said "How do you like her, aunt?" she answered, "Well enough, Lucien. I did not think her the girl you would have fancied; but I hope you like her, and I hope she likes you."

Rosanna came in the evenings, and Miss Forbes came in the daytime, when I was in the bank. Rhoda told me she sat by my aunt for hours, reading the Bible to her, "and talking so uncommon good, you wouldn't believe it, Lucien; Father Connolly himself couldn't say better—and not a bit bigoted. Do you know, she allows that Catholics will go to heaven as well as Protestants? I do like that young lady."

Helen never stayed for my home-coming, but her father was often there before me. He had got home from his important business in Edinburgh. I had excused myself from meeting Charles Barry at his house, being no company for the gay young naval officer who was now enjoying himself in London. I was looked for at home by eyes that were soon to close for ever; and Mr. Forbes was often there, talking with my aunt, reading to her even in her Catholic books, and seeming far more grieved and concerned than one could have expected, for Miss Livey had come to the natural time of departure. Slowly and gradually she drew on to the hour appointed.

More than a month had worn away with that strange, sad visitant, sickness, in our home. It was the first of it that I had

seen, and in the strength of life and health that first meeting with decay and death is apt to make a strong impression. It was not so with Rhoda; she had seen her young sisters and her mother die, and though more grieved to part with her old aunt than I could have once thought possible, she fell into the new state of things like one accustomed to it; sat up by night, and slept by day; noted every change, and told me what to expect. Miss Livey was wearing near her last; slept much and spoke little. Father Connolly, who had visited her most assiduously, thought it right to give her the last consolations of the Church.

“I have to see a poor man in your neighbourhood,” he said, when taking leave of me one evening—“I will be late going home, and as you sit up I will call between twelve and one, see how Miss Livey is, and if it seem necessary then, I’ll give her extreme unction, with God’s help, for, you see, I’ll have the holy chrism with me.”

After the priest had made that arrangement, it was agreed between Rhoda and I that she should sleep till Father Connolly knocked, while I sat watching by my aunt’s bedside, for Mrs. Muncy, who did duty for us sometimes, was nursing a

sick child of her own that night. Poor Rhoda was looking pale and thin with sitting in the sick room, and Hannah Clark, from her unpreventable noise, was worse than useless. They were both in bed, and the whole neighbourhood was hushed, for it was near midnight. I had sat reading the "Imitation of Christ" to Miss Livey, till she slept, and then sat leaning my head on my hand, feeling that life was but a vapour and death a certainty, and wishing that my mind could cast anchor in some faith against that trial. I thought she was still asleep as the clock struck twelve, when lifting up my eyes I saw the old woman's face turned up, and earnestly looking at me.

"Lucien," she said, and her voice sounded as firm and full as ever I heard it long ago in my childhood—"Lucien, dear, I don't know what you are thinking of. I hope it's something good. We have little enough time to think of that, and little inclination at the best. Maybe I ought not to be thinking of what is in my mind just now; but I have been wanting to ask you for the last month, and somehow could not get it out."

"What is it, aunt?" said I, coming close to her bed.

“Hannah and Rhoda are asleep, I suppose?” said Miss Livey, looking round the room.

“Yes, aunt; asleep for many an hour. What is it you want to ask me?”

“Well, Lucien, you’ll answer upon your conscience, and as you would like to have done when you come to be in my place. Have you any notion—any suspicion of what became of your brother Raymond, if he met with foul play, or who is guilty of the matter?”

Her voice had sunk to a deep, clear whisper, and her eyes were fixed earnestly, but calmly, on my face, as I answered—

“Upon my conscience, aunt, and should these be my last words, I solemnly declare to you that I neither know what became of my brother, nor have I the slightest suspicion of any person being concerned in his disappearance.”

“I believe you, Lucien, as truly as you say it. You never were given to falsehood, and you would not tell it now to a dying woman. Whatever you said, dear, would go out of the world with me; it was only to satisfy my own mind I asked you, for oh, Lucien, I sinned grievously against that boy.”

“You, aunt?”

“Yes, I did, in believing that he was guilty of

running away with his father's money, and bringing us all to wreck and ruin. That belief turned my heart and brain almost ; it made me send you off to that cold proud-hearted O'Neil when you were but an infant ; it made me a hard, stiff old sinner all my days, blaming him and blaming everybody for his sake, and he innocent all the while."

"You are blaming yourself overmuch now, aunt," and I took her thin shrivelled hand in mine ; "but if he were innocent, what do you think became of Raymond?"

"What his mother said, Lucien, what his mother said the night she lost her reason after seeing him in her room, dead and murdered in an old house in Dublin for the money he had in his care."

"Have you any knowledge, any certainty of that, aunt?"

"I have a certainty in my own mind as sure as that you are sitting there—oh, but it was late and sudden in the coming! He did not appear to me, thank God, my brain would not have stood that ; but a persuasion, an assurance of it all came on me with and like the lightning that evening the lawyer's letter came, Lucien. I know it, and I wanted to tell you before I went,

that you might not sin as I did in blaming the boy."

I felt my own breath coming quickly as I said—

"Aunt, will you tell me one thing more? Have you any notion by whom the deed was done?"

She had hitherto spoken so calmly and collectedly, with such a look of composed intelligence as gave her words, strange though they were, the weight and power of a dying testimony, and superstitious as it may seem, I could not help believing in the truth of the mysterious intimation she asserted. But at my last question, her look suddenly changed to one of nameless terror.

"Don't ask me that, Lucien, I cannot—I dare not tell you; it is so hard to believe, so hard to think of, and it may be wrong after all. What right have I, a sinner as I am, that never led a godly life, but was all my days taken up with worldly things; first managing the house in Armagh, and then fretting over the fall of it—what right have I to expect that God would send me a special revelation, and nothing else could justify one in mentioning people with a fair name and a high place? I won't—I can't take it on my

conscience, Lucien ; don't ask me ; let your poor old aunt go out of the world in peace ; I have enough to answer for 'besides—but the fires of purgatory must be fierce and terrible ! but my trust is in Him who died for us, Lucien ; put your trust in Him above all saints and angels, but don't forsake the holy Roman Church."

I was going to promise I never should—I would have promised anything to her then, and dared not repeat my question, though I would have given the world to know her thought upon it—when, after a minute's silence and covering her face with her hands, she said—

"Lucien, did my old ears serve me right that evening ? did Mr. Forbes say that money hadn't come from him ?"

"He did, aunt ; have you still the same opinion about that money ?"

"I have, God help me if I'm wrong !" she said, with a sort of groan, and covering her face still closer ; but at that moment Father Connolly's knock sounded at the outside door.

I admitted the priest from a warm wet night, such as come often at the close of the London summer, and told him what I really thought, that Miss Livey had been speaking so well and strongly, it was not likely her end could be near.

“Ah, Mr. La Touche,” said the devoted laborious priest, laying down the little box which contained the canonicals and requisites for his office, always carried with him to the bedsides of the sick and dying, and taking off his thin great coat, which the rain had drenched through, “there is nothing so uncertain as mortal strength at any time, and these brightenings up are apt to come just before the summons. I have often remarked the like ; but I hope you are right this time.”

Father Connolly was better acquainted with death than I could have been. When we entered her room, it was manifest that a change had passed over Miss Livey ; her face had grown sharper and more gravelike in those few minutes, and her breathing harder ; but she opened her eyes with a look of welcome to the priest, and said in a faint whisper,—

“Father, I am glad you have come, for my time is growing short.”

I left the room to awake Rhoda, and leave the dying alone with him who was to hear her last confession. What she could not take on her conscience to let me hear in that last hour, was no doubt uttered to his ears, and kept safe under the seal of his holy office. In the meantime I

woke my sister ; told her how near our loss was coming, and we wept together for the poor old woman, of whose grumblings we had been so weary, till Father Connolly came and bid us attend on the last sacrament of the Church.

In that hour of sorrow and first sight of death, showing life with all its aims and attachments to be but the vanity of vanities, I felt my heart going back, in spite of reason and inquiry, to the faith of my fathers and my childhood. When that last solemn rite was done — the anointing for the dead, practised by the worshippers in the catacombs, before the Roman world became Christendom, and derived, like most Christian creeds and customs, from the far off, ancient East ; still the last consolation which the oldest and most fallen church can offer to those that go down to dust and darkness — when it was done, and Miss Livey, after a pious ejaculation, and a long, I thought, inquiring look at the priest, took one of Rhoda's hands and one of mine, clasped them together with her own, said, "The Lord let nothing part you," closed her eyes, and seemed to fall asleep.

Father Connolly spoke some words of comfort, offered up the last prayer for the dying ; then there was a knock at our door, and he admitted

Watt Wilson, as the day was breaking dimly through the rain—"I am a Protestant, sir, but you'll let me stay to see the last of her," said the honest clerk, with tears in his eyes.

The priest said something, I know it was kind and charitable, in reply; and my father's faithful man, who had kept his loyalty to the family through good and evil fortunes for nearly forty years, knelt with us at the bedside, and prayed as devoutly as we did, though in his Protestant fashion.

"Does she know me?" he whispered to me when he rose.

"She knows nobody now in this world: her soul has passed out of its troubles; blessed be God she has made a good and pious ending!" said Father Connolly.

I bent over the bed, but not to close her eyes, they had closed for ever in that peaceful slumber: without a groan, without a struggle, the weary soul had departed from us, and Rhoda and I were in the world alone.

CHAPTER V.

A GENEROUS OFFER.

So Death came into Number 9 as he comes to all earthly houses, and made visible to me the communication which exists between every one of them and the grave. There went out of it a modest funeral, at which our neighbours gazed; they had little to see in Petersburg Place, and with the help of Father Connolly, Watt Wilson, and Mr. Forbes, who would be one of the mourners, we laid Miss Livey down far from all her kindred, under the turf of the Hammersmith churchyard, which happened to be our nearest cemetery.

The grey head was gone from among us, and the small household had become smaller; I thought of Rhoda being lonely now, and hastened home in the evenings. Watt Wilson considered her also, called himself, and brought

the Masons, and there was never a day that Helen Forbes did not drop in, talking so good and so sensibly, as Rhoda said, but never by any chance staying till I came home.

I fetched Rosanna too, in hopes that my sister and she would become intimate; the attic in Mayfair was not an eligible place for visiting, and since her exclusion from the sick room, Sally had got a notion that we were proud, and laid that sin particularly to the door of my innocent sister.

The farther she kept from Petersburg Place it seemed to me the better; Rosanna and Rhoda got on well, one could say no more and no less of their acquaintance.

I took an early opportunity to do my duty by telling the former, in one of our quiet walks, that every obstacle between us was now removed; I did not explain how, the Joyces were not likely to learn particulars, for Esthers did not know them, but Rosanna looked delighted, and when I set forth the propriety of waiting for a decent time after my aunt's death, the gentle girl acquiesced, as she had done in every arrangement of mine, and said, while clinging to my arm, "Lucien, I would wait for you fourteen years, as Abraham did for Rachel."

Rosanna's knowledge of history, sacred or profane, was not very accurate, but she would wait for me, and what sort of waiting for her had I been doing? Now at least I was keeping well with conscience, trying to forget, I mean, not to think of Madame Palivez; and something like success seemed to crown my efforts.

I came in and out of the bank, and did not cast a look at the private door. I went to Bolton-row without stopping in Curzon-street; the brass key was never taken out of my desk; the path up by the stream was turned away from. I got up an interest in cheap puddings, and modes of hashing mutton, for the purpose of leading Rosanna into the domestic school. I preached to her on those and kindred topics, to my own astonishment, if not to her edification.

Rosanna listened as usual, wondered at my wisdom, and promised everything; she would learn from the cookery books, make such nice dinners, and keep the house so neat; it was no use trying at home, Sally did not like anything of the kind, and always got angry when she went to put things straight: "But your sister is such a dear, good girl, Lucien, I am

sure she would not be angry at anything I should do, and won't she teach me house-keeping, for your sake?" said Rosanna, in her simplicity.

I did not think it necessary to enlighten my intended on Rhoda's domestic abilities. They got on well, as I have said, but Rosanna and Rhoda were not becoming intimate; there was much civility, but no confidence between them; and I could not help observing that the said deficiency was on my sister's side.

She and I had drawn closer together as our family circle was narrowed, but I had secrets to keep from Rhoda, and she had been long accustomed to keep most of her mind to herself. I remember telling her what Rosanna had promised and said, by way of making paths smooth, and removing any private prejudice, if the like existed.

"She had need to get a better teacher, Lucien, you know that," and my honest, good-humoured sister smiled.

"Yes, but you could teach her many things, Rhoda; she is very simple."

"Maybe she is," said Rhoda, darning away at her stocking; "in course you know best, but I never could settle it in my own mind whether

it was simplicity or being uncommon deep, that was the matter with her."

I thought of sisters-in-law, and sighed; good-tempered, kindly Rhoda was not above the ordinary ways of women as regarded her brother's bride; and often when listening to poor Rosanna's innocent prattle, I smiled to myself at the insinuation of her uncommon depth.

Things were progressing properly, however, and I was coming through Threadneedle-street on my way home one evening, when at Mr. Forbes' back door I saw an uncommon sight, consisting of his daughter Helen, leaning on the arm of a gentleman, and saying, "Oh, this is Mr. La Touche; I will just introduce you at once."

The gentleman and I looked at each other as she continued, after bidding me good evening, "my cousin, Charles Barry,"—for we had met and spoken before, without an introduction—I recognised the man who had stood by my side in Curzon-street on the night of Madame Palivez's ball, and he evidently remembered me; there was surprise and recognition in his look, and a muttered "By Jove!" reached my ear, as, being the first to recover my presence of

mind, I stepped up with extended hand, and said, "I am happy to meet Mr. Barry, though it is not for the first time."

"No," said he, recovering himself, and shaking hands with me heartily, "I am happy to meet you too, sir, and we must be obliged to Miss Forbes for letting us know each other's name."

Mr. Forbes now joined us; I explained to him, while Barry made clear to Helen, the fact of our meeting in Curzon-street. Both father and daughter thought it a singular coincidence that we should have heard so much of each other, and got acquainted without an introduction.

We all walked part of the way home together, Mr. Forbes and myself in company, Helen still in possession of her cousin's arm, but keeping so close to us that I could perceive the young officer was rather under tutelage, than on the ordinary footing of gentlemen cousins. He looked as much on his guard in her company as I had seen him off it in the crowded street: the ease, the frankness, even the courage was gone from him; but one somehow knew their absence to be temporary, they were native to Charles Barry, and would return the moment he got clear off. In the meantime, his walk and con-

versation bore an indescribable resemblance to what those of the prodigal might have been if not returning of his own accord, but caught and brought back from the husks, and, as an inevitable consequence, Miss Forbes' cousin seemed very much bored and particularly stupid. I suppose she was talking seriously and sensibly to him; she certainly did the most of the business, and I heard him occasionally respond, "Oh yes, certainly, very true, and no doubt."

At parting, they pressed me to come on Saturday evening—Charles and I should meet then and get better acquainted.

"And won't you bring your sister?" said Helen. "I have been coaxing her to come all this week, she will be so lonely when you are out; you can't think how handsome Miss La Touche is," she added, by way of edifying Charles Barry.

"Indeed," said he, getting off the prodigal for an instant, but it returned upon him with double weight as, with a promise to bring Rhoda, I went my way and they went homeward.

"No, Lucien," said my sister, when I mentioned the invitation, "Miss Forbes is very good, and so is her father; there is no people in the

world I have a greater respect for, as I ought, you know, but they are too grand for me to associate with. I like them coming here very well, but in their fine house and grand company I would have no peace, and neither would you, Lucien, for fear of something ungenteel coming out, and if you would just make an excuse for me, I would far rather stay at home with Hannah Clark."

I sincerely acquiesced in Rhoda's view of the case ; it was a proof of the girl's sound sense and independence of mind, and without fib or varnish I explained it quietly to Helen on the following Saturday evening, when we happened to stand together at the window looking for her father's home-coming, while Charles entertained himself with a volume of prints at the farther end of the room.

Had my design been laid against Miss Forbes heart and hand, there would have been rest in my mind regarding her cousin, the young naval officer. She discoursed to him very much in the manner of an elder sister or maiden aunt. He listened more quietly than the greater part of younger brothers and nephews, but the one was in the discreet vein and the other in the cowed department, whenever they happened to

be left together. Helen did not sing Scotch songs to him, did not gossip about Madame Palivez, or tell her experience in the gardening line, as she did to me; and it always happened when we met there on Saturday evenings, which was now a regular thing, that the banker took Charles in hand, and Helen and I kept company. I think the young man was glad of my presence, nevertheless; it helped him through the duty or penance he was obliged to do at Notting Hill House; his frank eyes told me so without intending it, we became friendly almost from first acquaintance, and he used to escort me part of the way home when the night was fine. I suppose he wanted fresh air after the restraint of the evening; and what a released man Charles Barry looked when fairly out of the grounds!

“He is an excellent man and a great Christian that uncle of mine,” was his remark, when lighting up his cigar, on the second walk we took together. “He was kind to me when I was a youngster; for that matter, he is kind yet; he would have brought me up to the banking business, made me his partner, and perhaps his heir. I might have been one of the city nobs, you see, but my father was a soldier and a gentleman; I

couldn't stand the eternal moping and church-going, and ran away to sea. Many an uncle would have given me up after that, but he didn't. One should not forget that, and I don't, Mr. La Touche; I stay with him always when I am in town, and play sobersides to suit his taste; nothing like doing as Rome does, one learns that on board ship, it's one duty, and the proper thing, you know, but confoundedly dull work."

"What! and your cousin, Miss Forbes, there?" said I, the temptation to quiz being irresistible.

"Helen is just as bad—good, I mean—as my uncle; I never met a girl so hard to get on with. By the way, Mr. La Touche, you and my cousin get on famously, because you are a proper sensible young man, I suppose, which I never was."

"Do you mean that I am respectably stupid, Mr. Barry?"

"No, not just that; but you have got a sober way, which goes down with my uncle and cousin; I don't say I would trust you far round a corner myself."

"Much obliged to you for your flattering opinion."

“Never mind, man; there are few saints among us, as our chaplain says, but Helen will be heiress of all my uncle’s gatherings; they must be no joke, for he is always making money, and spending very little. If she were not my cousin-german, which is too near a relationship to marry on—that’s my uncle’s opinion as well as mine—I should try to look sober and sensible, go to the Scotch Church, and get her to expound the Westminster confession—that’s what they hold by, you understand; my uncle wanted to convert me, but a Presbyterian meeting-house is no place for a gentleman’s son.

“Well, as I was saying, it’s worth a man’s while to look after my cousin Helen, though she is not over and above handsome, and does preach confoundedly,” and Barry gave a kind of wince indicating the displeasures of memory; “she is a good soul, and would never scold much, nor take state upon her. In short, Mr. La Touche, I was thinking it wouldn’t be a bad speculation for you; have I hit the right nail on the head?”

“Indeed you have not, Mr. Barry; I am not so absurdly self-conceited as to imagine that Miss Forbes, with her position and prospects, would think of an under-clerk, with

no connexions, no advantages to recommend him."

"Well, I don't know," interrupted Barry, "you are of a good family, that counts for something; you understand bank business, that would qualify you for stepping into my uncle's shoes, as somebody must when he steps out of them, and between ourselves, I don't think the man will have long life; something has broken him down early: I don't know if religion does the like, or if the loss of his wife and sons sits so sore upon him. At any rate, I don't think he will be a long liver. I know he has a good opinion of you, and I think so has Helen—she's uncommon good, you know, and wouldn't show it like other girls. In short, you have a chance, Mr. La Touche, a very good chance, and, for my own part, I don't know anybody I should rather have for a cousin-in-law, and I was just thinking, if you wanted a word said to her or my uncle—it is not always easy for a man to push his own merits forward, and tell people all that might be said in his favour—in short, Mr. La Touche, if you want anything of that kind done, Charles Barry is at your service."

"It is a very generous offer, sir," said I; "beyond my merits and my expectations."

“Come to the point,” said Barry; “you can talk a good deal better than I, but you don’t bandage my eyes. I see plain enough there is a good understanding between you and Helen.”

“There is a good understanding, Mr. Barry, but nothing of the kind you hint at. Mr. Forbes and his daughter have been such friends to me and mine as few families ever found in their misfortune; the obligations I owe them I can never repay, but shall be always proud to acknowledge; they are my best friends—I expect, I aspire to nothing more.”

“Oh, you don’t,” said Barry, stopping short in his walk, and surveying me through the smoke, as if to satisfy himself how the land lay.

“I do not, in all sincerity, but I am equally grateful to you for the friendly offer; that is, if you did not make it in jest.”

“Upon my soul I never was more in earnest in my life, nor more astonished either,” said Barry; “it did seem to me that you and my cousin had a carrying on of your own—she talked so much about you; mind, I don’t say that Helen is the girl to talk foolishly about any man, she don’t know much of the world, but she won’t be easily put upon, and if I thought

any man was trifling with her because she is pious and not pretty, I would do a cousin's duty, sir, and blow out his brains. Stop, now, Mr. La Touche, I did not mean you," he continued, for I had drawn myself up, and commenced a strong repudiation of all attempts or designs on the peace of Miss Helen Forbes; "I know you are not the man to be guilty of such dirty tricks; there is nobody I would prefer for a cousin-in-law, I say again, and I did suppose you were bent on that business, but I am all out, it seems. Is there anybody else in the wind?"

What right had Charles Barry, the young naval officer—the stranger to whom I had been introduced not a fortnight before—to inquire so deeply into my private concerns? The frankness, even the generosity of his nature, made me mistake the man; he was so ready to speak out his observations, so willing to offer a helping hand wherever it seemed to him wanted; so unacquainted with concealment, or the necessity for it, which had cast its darkening influence on my own life, that he seemed to me a meddler and a busybody, qualified for getting up reports and helping gossip. He should hear no tale of mine—no news to make a fuss about in Notting

Hill House, and quiz myself on whenever we came in contact. I would not tell fibs—but Charles Barry should go as wise as he came; so I responded carelessly, “Earning his own bread, and endeavouring to make his way in the world, is quite enough for a man in my position to have in the wind. I am not so fortunate as you, Mr. Barry; I have no connexions to assist me, no relations to care for me, except my sister. She and I are alone in the world; and the early and strange misfortunes of our family—of which you have probably heard, as Mr. Forbes knows them well—should be sufficient to keep us both sober and steady.”

“Oh yes, I heard of it—not from him, though; my uncle never likes to speak on the subject. I am sure he felt greatly for your father; and you’ll excuse me, Mr. La Touche, what I said was altogether in friendship. I wanted to do you a good turn, if I could—one is apt to get mistaken in these matters—but this is your place; your sister and you live here together—what a good thing it must be for a man to have a sister—and cousin Helen tells me she is uncommonly handsome,” said Barry, with an insinuating look.

I had no fears of Rhoda’s discretion; but the

idle young officer, on shore and off duty, should not get an excuse for spending his unemployed hours at No. 9, and amusing himself with my sister's rusticity when I was at work in Esthers' office.

“Miss Forbes always gives the best account of people's appearance, as well as their doings. She knows the ruin of our family has left my sister under many disadvantages of manner and education; but her kindness and good sense can allow for all. I am sorry to have taken you so far on this lonely road, Mr. Barry; do let me see you part of the way back,” and I turned to accompany him.

“Oh, nonsense,” said the frank young seaman, taking the hint that there was no introduction to be expected, “I am no girl, to be afraid of a lonely road. Good night, you won't mention what we were talking of to my uncle or Helen?”

“No danger of that,” said I; “it is certainly not a subject to be mentioned to them.”

“Of course not—but I thought it better to make sure you wouldn't; good night again,” and Barry marched back to Notting Hill House.

CHAPTER VI.

THE REVIEW.

WE met there on many a succeeding Saturday ; we continued as good friends as we had been before that conversation. Neither party ever returned to it, though Charles regularly walked home with me—that is, to the opening in Petersburg Place, and things went on as they had done in the company of Mr. Forbes and his daughter. The former talked to his nephew, and the latter talked to me. My mind did revert occasionally, while she sat working close by at her everlasting embroidery, singing at the piano, or pointing my attention to some choice article in one of the serious periodicals which covered the drawing-room table—it did revert, I say, to Barry's fancied discovery of the carrying on. "She is good, you know, and wouldn't show it like other girls," turned up in my recollection some-

times ; but there was nothing in Helen's manner to justify such an implication. I persuaded myself there was not, and was well pleased with that persuasion.

Was I not an engaged man ? and had I not sinned sufficiently against Rosanna ? What a complication of my ill-luck or ill-doing it would be to involve the daughter of my family's benefactor ! No ; Helen Forbes did not care for me, except as a family friend. Having once got on that footing, we could not get off it ; yet vanity, or conscience—I don't know which—made me feel warned. I resolved on looking well to my ways in Miss Forbes's company, to take care that Charles Barry might have no occasion for doing cousin's duty, and—what was far more to be dreaded—that I should have no further occasion for regret or repentance.

Rosanna got more than common attention in the ensuing weeks ; but I found the Joyces more frequently from home, and the slatternly-looking maid in Bolton-row could never tell me where they had gone, or when they should return. Rosanna could always explain matters ; it was Jeremy, who took them to Greenwich, Gravesend, or Richmond ; “ he had got a situation now, and was the best brother in the

world." Sally's fits also seemed to increase in frequency, though she appeared to be satisfied on the subject of our marriage; several of my visits were disappointed by the fact of the doctor being upstairs. Poor Rosanna always ran down to keep me out of the scene. What care and tenderness the girl had for me, and how she must have watched for my voice and step! Well, I was doing my duty to her, and behaving like a man.

Curzon-street had no attraction for my feet now. The private door in Old Broad-street was passed without regard. I had seen Calixi in the street, and never recognised him. I had made no attempts to fish news out of Esthers. The first step in conquering my folly had manifestly been taken; and, as the French say, it is the only one which costs. I had also taken a resolution to attempt no explanations of my absence or neglect, should Madame think it worth her while to call me to account. To the woman who had magnified my constancy, and taken such active measures to remove the last obstacle between her clerk and his happiness, I would rather have faced the scaffold than told the true state of the case.

There was no other story that would serve for

her or me. I would attempt none, but say that I wished to break off the compact I had voluntarily made, and leave it to her pride or generosity to release me without question. Would she be much offended? Would she be curious on the subject? Probably neither. Her Broadstreet business and Mayfair fashion would be sufficient to occupy her till she took another whim, and elected somebody else to the office of humble companion and friend, never to be acknowledged except in the back rooms or the villa.

I was confirmed in the latter idea by a suspicion that Madame had returned from her Russian expedition, though I had got neither notice nor glimpse of her; for going into the bank one day. I observed a carriage, evidently that of some foreign nobleman, with arms on the panel, and postillions and outriders in rich livery, standing at the private door. The unusual sight made me conclude it must be some client of more than common importance who had come to talk over business with the lady of the firm. There would doubtless be more plate or jewellery stowed away in those secure vaults. The rich livery and the arms probably required support in

the shape of a loan ; but what was that to the manager's clerk, who had his work to do, and his salary to earn ?

It was now the last week in October. Rhoda and I had become accustomed to our mourning trim and our diminished household, and the inhabitants of London got a great opportunity of crowding and pushing each other. Some regiments of Guards which had formed part of the army of occupation in France had got home, and were to be reviewed in Hyde Park by the Prince Regent, assisted by the Duke of Wellington and other military celebrities.

The town was as fond of a sight then as it is now, and by no means so empty in autumn. Many West-end families were still at home—not in the back rooms, but publicly ; and nobody of any pretensions to fashion thought of going farther away than Brighton, there being eternal moving between its Pavilion and Carlton House. The review in question had extraordinary attractions, the Guards had been at Waterloo ; there were colours to be presented ; a report had gone abroad that the Princess of Wales (afterwards Queen Caroline) had privately returned from

her travels, and would make her public appearance in the Park, to the expected confusion of his royal highness. All London were going to see, and taking their friends. Rosanna told me she had never seen a review, save one in the Phoenix Park, when she wore short frocks, and it was beautiful; so I promised to take her; for the loyalty of the city being great in those times, made it a general holiday, and the Palivez bank always followed the public example.

Rhoda had never seen a review, but thought it must be an uncommon fine sight, and she should like to go. Miss Forbes was of the same opinion. Her father was patriotically inclined and wanted to see the colours presented to a Scotch regiment in particular.

Sally Joyce said Jeremy must take her to a good stand, for it was the last sight of the season. There was a great getting of finery ready, and on the review-day we mustered a strong party, resolved to keep together against all chances, and having secured an eligible stand for ourselves, from which it might be hoped we should see some faint outline of the proceedings. Jeremy had the honour of escorting his elder sister, as commanded; I took charge of Rosanna;

Watt Wilson had Rhoda in his guardianship. The worthy bachelor had called so often to cheer her spirits and give her lessons in housekeeping, that I half thought my sister had made a conquest of his woman-defying heart, since Miss Livey's departure left her in sole possession of the annuity.

Helen Forbes leant on her father's arm, and they kept very near Rosanna and me though I could not get up courage to introduce the girl who had such a queer-looking sister to my friends from Notting Hill House; and Wilson, feeling himself bound to keep the last of the La Touches' secret, gave his employer to understand that I had got acquainted with the Joyces in America, and was just civil to the poor people on account that they were strangers and from Ireland.

It is unnecessary to say that we had a long and weary stand, a good deal of elbowing, and very little of the sight. Whosoever has been in a London crowd, and not what are called carriage people, or on the grand stand, will be aware of our experience.

But Rosanna said she saw the officers' plumes, and they were delightful. Sally threatened to take a fit if she was pushed; Mr. Forbes recommended us all to keep our station, as it happened

to be a safe one, and let the crowd behind us scatter away, and see the aristocratic company in front move off the ground. The weather was unusually fine, and the arrangement the best that could be made.

There we stood gazing and talking while the terrible London public surged and swayed, and broke away in slowly-dissolving masses, bent on seeing the last remnants of the spectacle; and carriages filled with gaily dressed ladies, groups of fashionable equestrians, military officers and notables of all sorts, swept past us, and were recognised by the cheering crowd.

I had done my devoirs throughout the day, and was getting considerably tired of Rosanna's "Goodness me! and isn't that fine?" Helen Forbes stood at my other side, and as there was danger occasionally from the pressure of passing people, I gave her my other arm, that she might stand the more safely between me and her father. Pale, slender, and delicate as she was, Helen looked exhausted with the long day's standing and being pushed about; but her cheerful patience and good sense made her pleasant company under any circumstances, and Miss Forbes was remarkably long-sighted.

"Do look this way," she said, in a half

whisper, directing my attention to a horseman who was keeping remarkably close to one of the carriages ; “ there is the Russian Prince whom Madame Palivez is going to marry. Esthers told me all about him ; his name is Galatzin. What a handsome man ! and how well he rides ! They will just suit each other. Esthers says he has immense estates, and is of the highest rank in Russia next to the Imperial family. How splendidly Madame is dressed, how pleased she looks, and what attention he pays her ! I am sure it will be a match, and a very suitable one—don’t you think so, Mr. La Touche ? ”

My eyes had followed Helen’s motion, and seen, as the carriage came nearer, a really magnificent specimen of the Russian gentleman—large, powerfully made, but active and graceful, wearing a field-marshal’s uniform, and mounted on an Ukraine charger.

‘The vehicle to which he kept so close was one I should have known among any number—Madame Palivez’s own triumphal chariot, in which I had seen her borne away to Carlton House, all lace and diamonds. She sat in it now alone, almost as richly dressed, and occupied in conversing with the attentive horseman.

“ There is his carriage ; who can these ladies

be that are in it?" and Helen notified the very equipage, postillions, outriders, and all, which I had seen at the private door in Broad-street; there were three ladies, one old, two young, but all foreign, in it; who they were I neither cared nor knew.

"I found out it was his," she continued, "by seeing him drive up in it one evening last week to visit Madame in her villa; but the hill side was too steep, and the Prince had to get out, just by the stream, you remember, where we saw Madame let her horse drink — you are looking terribly fatigued, Mr. La Touche; do let me liberate your arm and lean on papa, I am sure he is not so tired."

I retained her arm, and replied coherently and satisfactorily—one does the like at times, without knowing what one says; but every word Miss Forbes had uttered passed through my brain like a ploughshare through a stubborn soil. Before she had finished, the carriage and the cavalier, getting out of the slowly-moving crowd of the select, passed so close to our group that Madame could not avoid seeing every one of us; but had we all, and myself in particular, been part of the Park trees, she could not have taken less notice, and I, to save my life, could not

have helped looking at her. How easy and yet how stately she sat there, letting the Prince talk his best in good French, as Russians always speak—looking at nothing but seeing all—getting bows and nods from all sides, and returning some of them, a lady too certain of her position to be concerned about it, and too proud to be vain of her advantages.

Yet as her carriage passed, and as my eyes followed it in spite of my judgment, a sudden pallor swept over the lady's face, as if from swift and inward pain, and I saw Sally Joyce deliberately gazing at her, as if expecting, or rather demanding recognition; and she said to Jeremy, but loud enough to reach my ears,

“Passing people like dirt in that fashion, and them knowing all about her, some folks have brass in their faces.”

Jeremy said :

“Hush, Sally, don't talk in that queer way.”

On which his sister began to scold him, with an assurance that she would talk as she pleased; that her mother was a lady; that she regarded nobody for their riches; and if things weren't made up for, she would say queerer things yet, maybe.

I was looking and listening, and utterly oblivious of who it was that leant on my right arm, when a slight movement like shrinking away made me turn to Rosanna; had anything in my face or manner given her an inkling of the truth, that she looked so distressed and frightened? but it was over in a moment, and she said unconcernedly,

“How grand Madame Palivez is to-day, and the Prince she is to be married to riding beside her! Do let me go and speak to Sally a minute, she is getting into one of her tempers, and will take a fit.”

Her arm was slipped out of mine, and she had slid behind her sister with some gentle remonstrance before I could collect myself, and Helen at the same moment drew my attention in the opposite direction by saying :

“My cousin Charles has been paying his obeisance to you there for the last five minutes; I wonder he don't come over; but I suppose those young officers he has got among are too gay for our company.”

There was Charles Barry among a group of officers, naval and military; he had been

far in front, was still at some distance, and seemed in no hurry to join us, but bowed to me with a stiff courtesy very unlike his wont, and as I returned the salute, Watt Wilson assured us there was a clear passage now and we had better get home.

When we had fairly turned, Rosanna came back to me; her fright and distress were over, perhaps it was all about Sally and her dreaded fits. She told me a great deal on that subject which I did not hear. Rhoda had asked her to go home with us, but she could not, on Sally's account. We parted in the Park, and the kindly clasp she gave my hand went to my heart like a dagger.

I got home, and made an excuse for getting out again, leaving honest Watt Wilson and the Masons with my sister; they thought it was some appointment with Rosanna that took me, but it was to scour for miles along all the lanes and by-roads in the neighbourhood, through the fast-falling autumn night, and battle with my own desperate thoughts.

My calls in Broad-street or at the villa had not been missed; there was another that came in his carriage or on his Ukraine charger, a Russian prince of immense estates, and rank

next to the Imperial family, of years approaching her own—a suitable match for the last of the Palivezi, the heiress of their wealth, and the prudent manager of their business. Well, was it to be wondered at? Princess Galatzin was a title that would become her, that would tally with her pride, her high descent, and doubtless her expectations.

It was a settled thing, everybody knew it but myself; for some small end of his own, Esthers kept all such news from me. Madame Palivez would marry Prince Galatzin, and I would marry Rosanna Joyce. That was the proper, the natural order of things. I had chosen, I had made sacrifices, I had been assisted in a most friendly manner to see my way clear to the match; I had seen my danger, made endeavours, thought myself a free agent, and resolved to hold by the right, but that hour after the review upset all my revolutions, cancelled all my endeavours, and brought me back to bondage and despair.

I would bring out the brass key, I would call upon her in the villa and the back rooms; I had a right to do so—she had called me her friend, and made a compact with me, and I should at least hear if Esthers' story were true, if she

were really going to marry the Prince. What was that to me? was not I an engaged man, and poor Rosanna had been leaning on my arm at the very moment I heard the news, caught perhaps the altered expression of my face, guessed—but no, she never could guess the altered state of my mind since the time we walked and talked in Baltimore.

With that thought, better feelings and wiser reasoning came to my help, but it was only to show me how hopeless the case had become. In spite of my utmost exertions after duty and well-doing, in spite of my avoiding the snare and holding fast by honour and promise, the fascination was upon me still, stronger than ever it seemed, through absence and impossibility. If Madame married the Prince, she would probably go to Russia and reside there, much as she dreaded the climate, and I should never see her more; but the bond was on my heart never to be broken, life henceforth had no aim—no hope for me; yet I would persevere in the right course; keep my solemn engagement to the girl that loved me so long and well; never could my conscience bear the weight of such a crime as breaking her faithful, loving, gentle heart.

Had I not won it by sincere and earnest wooing? was it not, after all, the only heart that cared for me? Madame Palivez had none for any man, if she married a thousand princes, yet it was plain to me then that I had never loved the young Rosanna as I did that woman so many years my senior, so utterly beyond my reach, and surrounded with so dark a mystery.

Sally Joyce's unaccountable looks and words that day, my own encounter with the ragged man, my old aunt's dying words, spoken on the verge of the grave and in the deep midnight, concerning people who had a high place and a fair name, and her conviction regarding the annuity, all at once came crowding on my memory—it was confusion inextricable and without measure, but it came with a dreadful sense of warning and of crime.

There was one plan for me—the best and it seemed the only safe one: I would delay no longer, but put it out of my own power to break my engagement or Rosanna's heart by getting married as soon as possible. It would bring matters to a final settlement, give me the cares and responsibilities of life to think and provide for, and leave less time for dream-

ing over worse than folly. On that purpose my thoughts came to an anchor, as it were; the more I considered it, the more rational and prudent it seemed. I felt that Miss Livey herself would have excused the apparent disrespect to her memory had she known the motive. I could not take my sister entirely into confidence; there was that in my case which went beyond Rhoda's understanding and experience; but the very next evening, when the fierceness of the inward storm was over, and I was in my right mind once more, I took the opportunity of getting into private conversation on my peculiar affairs, telling her what high time I thought it to get settled in life, now that she was safely provided for; that Rosanna had such an uncomfortable home, and seemed likely to agree so well with her in No. 9.

"Well, Lucien, you know best, in course," said Rhoda, with an astonished and not gratified look; "but you can't get married in mourning, you know—it wouldn't be lucky; and I thought you would have worn it six months, anyhow, for our aunt."

"It is from no disrespect to her, Rhoda; and our mourning needn't be cast off either, except on the wedding-day. Rosanna and I will get

married very quietly; I don't see why we should raise a fuss about it; you and Watt Wilson will be sufficient witnesses. Sally and Jeremy may attend if they like; and we will come from the church to our own house." My sister was looking at me while I spoke, with great amazement in her large honest eyes. Perhaps she saw something very unlike impatience for wedded happiness in my face; for, when I had finished, she gave me another earnest survey, and said, "Lucien, are you afraid of anything happening between you and Rosanna—any division or jealousy? or is it the world's talk, or her sister's tongue? if it's not unruly, nobody's is, I know. But what is it, Lucien?—for I don't think this getting married in a hurry comes of your own mind."

"You are right, Rhoda; there are reasons that make me wish to settle the business—some that you have mentioned, and some more that are hardly worth mentioning. We have been long engaged; Rosanna is not comfortable—not safely settled at home; there might be talk—there might be jealousy, as you say. At any rate, it is best to get married; it keeps one from changing one's mind."

"But, Lucien, dear, it would be worse to

change one's mind after the job was done. You know the proverb about marrying in haste and repenting at leisure. I know your promise to Rosanna, and I don't want you to be a forsworn man; but, Lucien, if you think there is any chance of either of you changing, it will happen on her side as fast as on yours, or I'm mistaken; but if you think there is any chance, for goodness sake, don't get married. Changes that begin on this side of the wedding-day are sure to get worse on the other, when there is no going back. Lucien, dear, I don't want to get secrets out of you; but I have had a notion, ever since I saw her face, that you and Rosanna wasn't intended to go to church together. Maybe I am wrong, Lucien; maybe it was because I didn't want to part with you—and marriage always parts brothers from sisters; but I did think it, and so did my aunt, that's gone."

"Rhoda," said I, "don't press me further,"—her faithful and affectionate reasoning was more than I could bear—"there are causes I can't tell you, which make it prudent for us to get married; remember, it is nothing that concerns Rosanna's reputation, but no good will come of putting it off any longer."

"Then don't put it off, Lucien; the Lord's

directing you, no doubt, though I don't see the rights of it; you never did nothing disrespectful or bad, and I'll warrant you are thinking for the best now; get married as soon as you like, I'll do all in my power to make you a nice wedding dinner, and get Mrs. Mason up to help; it won't be my fault if Rosanna and me doesn't agree well—I think I could agree with Sally for your sake, Lucien."

"I'll never ask you to agree with Sally, or anybody like her; Rosanna is a good girl, and will do whatever pleases me."

"I hope she will," said Rhoda.

"And we will never part," I continued, "till you get married and leave me, perhaps for Watt Wilson."

"No, indeed," said Rhoda, "he is a great deal too sensible to look at the likes of me; and besides, Lucien,"—my sister drew herself up with all the gentility of the La Touches of Armagh—"though I have got no schooling myself, I would like a more larned man—but I don't want nobody; just you take your own course, I'll warrant it's a wise one, and get married as soon as you like."

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

It had become a sort of standing arrangement for me to visit Rosanna on Sunday evenings. I chose to do so by way of superseding Madame's claim to those hours, made at the time she gave me the brass key, a conscientious penitents turn to sacred duties the times in which they were wont to sin, and having taken my resolution regarding a speedy and quiet wedding, I determined to announce it formally on my next visit, never doubting that my intended, together with Sally and Jeremy, would make their preparations as quickly as I could wish.

The review took place on Thursday; on Friday evening Rhoda and I had come to an understanding, as related in the last chapter, and on Saturday I went to Notting Hill House

on the usual invitation, having screwed up my courage to the point of informing Mr. Forbes, as his friendship to the family gave him a right to hear of so near an event.

The presence of Charles Barry, however, prevented a disclosure that evening. Stiffly as he had bowed to me in the Park, the young sailor was back at our old point of friendship and familiarity. If there were any change perceptible in his manner, it regarded the Forbes', with whom I thought him rather more on his guard than usual, and the mystery seemed explained when we got out on our accustomed walk.

Charles lighted his cigar, said it was a fine night, took five or six strides, hemmed three times, and then said, "Mr. La Touche, I know you to be one of the best fellows in the world, and I want you to do me a bit of a service."

"Anything in my power, Mr. Barry," said I.

"Well, then, I hate ceremony, and I know you don't want it; in short, hem! could you oblige me with the loan of ten pounds or so. Staying in this London runs away with a confounded deal of money, it never will keep in my pockets anyhow, and I happen to want a trifle

for—for a particular occasion,” said Barry ; “ it is true my uncle or cousin Helen would lend me that and more, but I never like to ask them, you see, they are so good, and so serious, and so careful ; not at all miserly, though, I’ll say that for them ; and then I ran away to sea, and wouldn’t go into the bank business, which might have made me a rich man ; one don’t like to show an empty locker—purse, I mean—and get good advice after that, so I prefer asking you, though we are not much more than strangers ; I’ll take it as a great obligation, and be sure to return the money.”

The request had rather surprised me. I had an inward conviction that the emptiness of the locker was, and would be, a frequent case with Mr. Barry, and I had no confidence in his concluding promise ; but Mr. Forbes’ nephew had a claim on my finances ; I had been paid my quarter’s salary within that week, and could afford the loan, though with a doubt of never seeing it again, and a fear of renewed applications ; so I assured him of my willingness, happiness, &c., hinted that the like was not often in the power of a man in my position, though, fortunately, I could spare it for the present, and nothing could give me greater

pleasure than to serve any relation of Mr. Forbes, not to speak of the sincere respect I entertained for himself.

“ I am sure it is very good of you, and I’ll never forget it,” said Barry ; “ they don’t give clerks much at the Palivez banks, I dare say, for all the wealth that woman has, past counting, they tell me, and she’s going to marry that Russian Prince ; by-the-bye, I don’t think it is for the bank he is looking after her ; she is a first-rate woman, Mr. La Touche, a regular beauty, though there is something too proud and high about her for my taste. But as I was saying, they don’t give clerks much there, or anywhere else, and if you should happen to run short at any time, just let Charles Barry know. Shall I wait outside, or go in, till you get the needful, that is, I mean if you haven’t it about you.”

“ Do come in, I don’t generally carry so much, having learned Scotch prudence by associating with the best people that ever came out of Scotland or any other country.”

“ My uncle and cousin, you mean,” said Barry, accompanying me into the parlour, where Rhoda dropped him her best curtsy, and retired. The seaman could take his cue from circumstances ; he was not to be introduced,

and, therefore, made no comments, but took a good look at my sister, intended not to be observed, seated himself with great complacency, pulled out a splendidly gilt, but empty pocket-book, and quietly waited till I had opened my desk and handed him what he termed the needful, in the shape of two bank-notes.

“Very much obliged, I am sure; you are the man for a bark in distress,” and he put them away with the air of one to whom borrowing was no new business. “I’ll return it within two months at farthest, and never forget the obligation; let me hope, Mr. La Touche, that you won’t forget my purse is at your service in any stress of weather; and, by-the-bye, you won’t mention it to my uncle, or cousin Helen, they might think it odd I didn’t ask themselves, and you know how very good they are.”

“I never mention any trifling service that it may be in my power to do; the matter rests between you and I as one of mutual confidence.”

“I knew you were a gentleman, every inch; from Ireland, too, like myself, one of the Barrys of Howth, you understand; but good night, and a thousand thanks.” The young officer wrung my hand till I thought it would be scarcely fit

for writing again, and set off at a rattling pace towards London.

When I knocked at the door in Bolton-row next evening, having avoided Curzon-street, and prepared myself to surprise and delight Rosanna, the slatternly maid informed me that none of the Joyces were at home. Their attic was certainly dark, but I thought it very strange, having sent a note on Saturday to announce my coming.

“Well, sir, I don’t know where they are gone,” said the maid, in reply to my inquiries; “Miss Rosanna went to chapel this morning, but she didn’t come back. Miss Joyce and Mr. Jeremy were very much put out about it at first, but then they thought she was spending the day with a friend; and it’s my belief, sir, they went there, too; howsoever, I’ll tell them you were axin, and leave your card on the table upstairs.”

I went home rather chagrined and disappointed; it was strange that Rosanna should choose to spend the evening with a friend when she expected me. I had not been accustomed to such off-hand doings, and the purpose on which I had come made the trifle jar still more upon me.

I would not call again till she gave me some sign of repentance. Rosanna would not be long about that; a letter of ill-spelled apologies and earnest requests to see me, would probably be awaiting my return home, if not forwarded by some street boy to the bank. I said as much to Rhoda; but Monday came, I came home, and there was no letter. It was very strange; but Rosanna should get time to come to her senses; it might be well to let her know I was not to be trifled with before the wedding day or after it.

A man keeping his engagement can sit down coolly in such circumstances; and I had sat down to tea with my sister by our bright fire, for the night had fallen an hour or more, when a thundering knock at the door startled us both; and before we could recover our composure, in rushed Sally Joyce, her old shawl half off, her bonnet half on, her grey, tangled hair streaming over her face, and her eyes flashing fury.

“Mr. La Touche,” she cried, flinging herself on the sofa, “our family are ruined, and my heart broken. I know I’ll never get over it, neither will Jeremy, neither will you, for that matter—Rosanna has gone off—eloped with that Mr. Barry—the wretch! the villain! and they are not

married yet. But you'll save her—you'll rescue my sister from ruin—you'll make him marry her. She has behaved very ill to you, I must allow; but neither she nor Jeremy ever would take my advice; their mother was a common person. And you wouldn't be advised either, Mr. La Touche; you wouldn't get married at Baltimore when I wanted you, and you wouldn't get married here—first on account of your old aunt, and then on account of your mourning. It is all your fault that my sister has disgraced herself and me. Oh, gracious! gracious! to think of a respectable family ruined and brought to shame; but I'll drown myself," and she fell back with a tremendous shriek.

Why Sally did not take a fit was a problem Rhoda never could solve; but the excitement was more assumed than real, and there was no encouragement for demonstrations. My sister and I sat fairly stunned and stupified for some minutes, the news was so startling, so unexpected; while Sally quietly drew herself up again, looked at us both, and said, "Yes, indeed, it's true; she's gone off with Mr. Barry, and somebody must make him marry her. You'll do it, Mr. La Touche; you won't forsake us in our trouble—you wouldn't see our family disgraced."

By this time there was another knock, and in came Jeremy, as subdued as ever, but very much out of breath: his sister had evidently outrun him. He sat down in the corner, the place assigned to him by nature; I collected my scattered senses sufficiently to inquire into particulars. Rhoda ably assisted me. We both got an inkling of design and preparation on the part of the Joyces; and between comments and questions, which neither memory nor patience will permit me to set down in full minuteness, we made out that Charles Barry had been paying Rosanna attentions for some time, "entirely unknown to Jeremy and me," said Sally; "we wouldn't have suffered such a thing, on your account, Mr. La Touche—but girls are so artful;" and that on the Sunday, when I was to call with my great intelligence, she had gone out, on a pretence of going to chapel—"in her very best clothes," said Jeremy—did not return at the usual time, and was finally traced to a postchaise waiting for her—it was supposed, by appointment—at the top of Berkeley-street, with Mr. Barry inside, which carried the pair to Gravesend, where his ship, the *Rattlesnake*, was lying, and Rosanna was established in genteel lodgings. It was also evident to us that the elder sister

and brother, notwithstanding their disavowal, had been cognisant of the courtship, and hoped for a match which would raise their sister to the position of a naval officer's lady—a bit of rank being dear to the souls of the Joyces—but, like most of their class, they had miscalculated on the world they were in.

Sally was not to be disappointed so easily, however; when matters went contrary to her expectations, she thought of me as a power that might be brought to bear on Barry—hence our evening visit and acquaintance with the event.

I have said that the first announcement of it stunned and stupified me. Rosanna's falsehood and desertion were the last things I could have expected in this world—the girl so fond, so devoted, so simply dependent on my slightest word, so ready to acquiesce in all my wishes, whose gentle faith had risen up like an accusing angel against my involuntary forgetfulness of the long-pledged vow, whose loving constancy had made me determine to cleave to her in spite of every temptation of my own heart, and every drawback in herself and family. Yet all the time she was playing me false—playing herself false too.

I could see through it now, and understand a

thousand indications which had been mistaken or unobserved at the time. The frequent "from home's," the runnings down with accounts of Sally being in a fit, to prevent my getting upstairs, the high-pitched voice and laughter set down to the doctor's credit, and many more trifles not worth recording, were now plain and circumstantial evidence of what had been going on.

The like faithless artifices have turned true and honest men to be women-haters all their days—not rational, perhaps, yet not to be wondered at. Even I recoiled from the smooth, silly, yet deep, depravity of the character I had thought so simple and childlike; my pride was sorely wounded, my sense of honour and truth was revolted, but my conscience told me that I also had been false and faithless in heart, though not in action or intent; and I could not assume the betrayed and injured man, however suitable to the circumstances in which I found myself.

"I am sorry for her own sake and for yours," I said, with a calmness that astonished Rhoda. "If it were in my power to save her from shame and ruin, I would do it; but since she has voluntarily placed herself in such a position, there is no law, no means available for her rescue. As

her nearest relations, it is your duty to go and endeavour either that Barry shall marry her, or that the improper connexion may be broken up. Neither common sense nor the feelings of a gentleman permit me to interfere. I cannot challenge Mr. Forbes' nephew to meet me with pistols in our country's fashion, if there were not other sound and weighty reasons against such a proceeding."

"But you can go and talk to him," cried Sally. "Somebody must go; he won't mind Jeremy or me."

"No, Miss Joyce; I cannot, and I will not. There is but one way in which Mr. Barry and I could meet, according to the opinions of Irish gentlemen; and though I am not in the position once occupied by my family, I cannot so far forget my early education. Your sister has behaved unhandsomely towards me—but we will pass that over; she has behaved still more unhandsomely to herself and to you. Yet for the affection that was once between us, I wish to save her from the consequences, if possible; and the only practicable course I can see, since Barry will not mind you or Jeremy, is to apply to his uncle, Mr. Forbes. He is a good

man, and his advice may have some weight with his nephew."

"Couldn't you go to Mr. Forbes?" cried Sally. "You are such friends with him and his daughter! Poor Rosanna always thought there was something between you. I am sure it was that that drove her to do what she did. Oh! but we are the unfortunate family! everybody helping to betray and ruin us."

I stopped Miss Joyce with a brief but explicit declaration that I would not go on such a mission to Mr. Forbes; that, if such an application were made at all, it should come from her and her brother; and that I would support it with all the influence my intimacy with the family gave me, at the same time prudently advising that she should apply by an humble letter, and not a personal appearance at Notting Hill House.

To my great surprise and gratification, Sally was prepared to avoid the latter course. She had paid a visit to Mr. Forbes at his own bank in order to ask a holiday for Jeremy, I believe, according to her intrusive custom. Helen happened to be in her father's private room at the time, and the composed, melancholy gravity of father and daughter seemed to have effectually

subdued and almost frightened the chieftainness of the Joyce household. In short, she was in no haste for going to Notting Hill House.

Jeremy refused to go—supported, I believe, by my countenance—though Sally wanted things done on the spot. She would have scolded, probably gone into fits; but I stood calmly on my wrongs, Rhoda followed my example, and at a rather late hour we got the Joyces sent home to write to Mr. Forbes and look after Rosanna.

Is it a shame, is it a sorrow, to confess that when I retired into the parlour with the full knowledge that my plighted bride's breach of vows had made me a free man from the engagement of three year's standing, for which I had flung away my chance of wealth and station, worked so steadily and struggled so hard against both friends and fortune—I*felt positively unbound, re-chartered, and almost light of heart?

It was no wrong, no cause of repentance, to love Madame Palivez now. What if she did not care for me, and never would, after my fashion? Yet was I not her friend? Had she not made a compact with me, and given me a brass key, the former of which I had broken and the latter laid aside for the sake of one who was deceiving and cheating me all

the while? I would go to the villa and to the back rooms now without remorse; but she had forgotten me, and was going to marry Prince Galatzin.

“Lucien dear, don’t take it so much to heart,” said Rhoda, coming up to me before I was aware, and laying her hand on my shoulder, where I stood deep in my own thoughts by the fading fire. “She is not worth thinking of, that could behave so to you. It is hard, I’ll allow, after so many years’ company keeping, and all that you have done to marry and get a home for her; but, Lucien dear, don’t take it to heart—there is enough women in the world besides, goodness knows! You’ll get a wife worth a thousand of her. I always knew she was deep and deceitful; so did our poor aunt that’s gone. I knowed it by her look, though she didn’t say it, the very first day you brought her here. Time has showed what was in her. But, Lucien, I love you better than ever she did;” and I felt my sister’s tears fall heavy on my hand.

She was thinking of Rosanna, and I was thinking of Madame Palivez. The illusion had to be maintained, but I could not let my sister grieve unnecessarily.

“Rhoda,” said I, flinging my arms about her, “I know you love me better than ever she did—better than I deserve ; but don’t grieve about it. I won’t take it to heart ; she is not worth it, as you say. I know there are more women in the world, but I want no more of them. I’ll never marry ; my own good sister is better and truer to me than any wife.”

Rhoda did not know the real spring of that speech ; but she kissed me, and dried her eyes, saying at the same time—

“But, Lucien dear, you’ll speak to Mr. Forbes, and get him to talk to the young gentleman. You wouldn’t let her fall into ruin and disgrace, for all that has come and gone.”

I promised everything possible ; and Rhoda and I talked over the whole subject for an hour or two before we parted for the night. I think she considered me a perfect model of good sense and pious resignation, from the calmness and fortitude with which I bore the disappointment of my fondest hopes ; and her estimate rose still higher on the following morning, when the early post brought me an American letter enclosing my uncle’s wedding cards, and announcing with short and civil formality, his

marriage with Mrs. Maynard and adoption of her son.

“It’s no wonder that everybody from Solomon down has been speaking against women these hundreds of years,” said Rhoda, “when one thinks of what you throwed away for her; but that old man mightn’t have been in such a hurry. If he had only waited to hear that it was all over you might have been his heir yet, instead of that widow’s son. Howsoever, we can live without him, Lucien.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLES BARRY PAYS PENALTY FOR INDISCRETION.

ESTHERS did not look quite satisfied when I saw him next day in the bank. Cunning as he was, the manager had been misled exactly like his half sister and brother, and was equally chagrined at the result. He had too much pride or prudence to enter on the subject, but I knew how it stood with him, and for my own dignity's sake kept an equal reserve.

So we met, and said good morning, and transacted business as if nothing had happened, and all the day the thought of being released from my engagement was with me like a new-left legacy or a mortgage paid off. Nevertheless I would try to do what was right and generous by the unlucky girl. That she had shared in her family's delusion touching the high match, I could not doubt; that she had been persuaded

through her vanity, weakness of mind, or very moveable affections, to elope with Charles Barry, was also plain.

I knew the Joyces would lose no time in making their application. I had advised them to do so, and by way of backing it up, I availed myself of the privilege of intimacy to call at Notting Hill House as early as I could the same evening in hopes of finding Mr. Forbes at home.

The serious footman never thought it necessary to announce me. I walked straight into the drawing-room, and the first object on which my eye rested was the man on whom I was bound to take vengeance, or at least regard as the destroyer of my peace, for there, opposite to Helen and her father, sat Charles Barry. Mr. Forbes had received the Joyces' application in the morning, and the good man sent down an urgent request to Gravesend for his nephew's immediate presence at Notting Hill House.

Charles, either unwilling to refuse his uncle, or unaware that his delinquency had come to the Forbes' knowledge, came accordingly, and was in course of being lectured or advised when I made my appearance. It was a trying occasion; but the difficulty being real only on his side,

made Barry evince the greater perturbation. He sprung from his chair the moment I entered, exclaiming—"Mr. La Touche, I am ready to give you the satisfaction of a gentleman ; but I tell you here, before my uncle and cousin, I did not know you were engaged to the girl. I met her in Baltimore at the theatre, when my ship was there, the summer before last. We struck up acquaintance, and, confound it, have been carrying on with letters and meetings ever since.

"I saw you calling at the house in Bolton-row, but they said it was coming to see Jeremy, because your father and his had been acquainted in Dublin. I had a sort of suspicion in my mind, for nobody can deny that she is pretty, and tried to sound you at the last. You'll remember it, I dare say ; and I am sorry I borrowed the ten pounds. I would have gone to the worst Jew in London rather, if I had known how the land lay. But you put me off the tack—you know you did—or I never should have acted so by a friend. I am ready to give you the satisfaction of a gentleman—but," and he glanced defiantly at his uncle and cousin—"nobody in their senses could expect me to marry a girl who has deceived us

both, with no family, and a mad sister into the bargain."

"For shame, Charles," cried Mr. Forbes, before I could get in a word—"would you add sin to sin by laying all the blame on the girl you have seduced, and putting your own and another's life in jeopardy, as if that could mend the matter? Sit down, Mr. La Touche," he continued, shaking hands with me; "I did not expect to see you, but I am glad you have come. Sit down, and help us to convince this foolish young man of his iniquity."

"Iniquity, indeed!" cried Barry. There must have been something in my look that gave him courage, though I did not intend it. "Mr. La Touche knows the world better than to make so much ado about nothing. A frolic with a pretty girl is not such an uncommon thing. One would think it was murder I committed."

I knew the Scotch banker to be a nervous man, and one of high principles; but I was not prepared for the shock which his nephew's flip-pant and common-place defence seemed to give him. He turned white, as if struck by sudden faintness, leant back in his chair, and partly covered his face with his hands.

"Mr. Barry," said I, catching at the oppor-

tunity to have my say—"had I been aware of your presence, I should not have come here this evening. At the same time allow me to assure you that I attach no blame to you for my own particular wrong. It is my sincere belief that you were as much in the dark on the subject of my claims as I was regarding your pursuit. The satisfaction you offer is neither rational nor requisite. I want nothing of the kind from Mr. Forbes' nephew; but I ask you as one who has still an interest, though but of memory, in the case, to restore peace to an unfortunate family, to your own conscience, and to her future life, by marrying the girl who has preferred you to me, as well as to her own reputation."

"Well spoken, and worthy of yourself, Lucien," said Mr. Forbes, brightening up again. "Charles, there is a noble lesson for you, from a lad many a year your junior." The latter observation was ill-timed, to say the least of it; Barry felt himself put in a corner, and replied, "I am very much obliged to him, but I am not in the habit of wanting lessons; no doubt the one he has given would serve his purpose just now—not a bad chance for getting the girl off his hands."

“Mr. Barry,” said I, my Irish blood boiling up in spite of good sense and surroundings, “you have offered me the satisfaction of a gentleman, and I demand it now, not on account of Rosanna Joyce, but for your base insinuation.” I know Charles was fumbling for a card, but Helen, who had been sitting silently at her needlework—I think there must have been a composing influence in that girl’s needle—rose from her seat, stepped in between us, motioned me to sit down, took Barry by the arm, and said, in her gentle, persuasive manner, “Cousin Charles, do come with me.”

Barry hesitated sullenly for a minute, then relaxed, and she led him quietly out of the room, while I sat down, not knowing what to say, and feeling that my reputation for wisdom was gone with the Forbes’. The banker looked after his daughter; it was an earnest, thankful gaze, and then looked at me reprovably but kindly—“Lucien, lad, you should not give way so far as to countenance that sinful and foolish practice called giving satisfaction; I know it is too common in your country; all countries have their peculiar sins and follies, proving the general corruption of human nature. You were sorely provoked, I grant, but the lad didn’t know

what he was saying; men will say anything to excuse their own wickedness, and Charles is not over gifted with judgment—but let it drop, Lucien, let it drop.”

I professed my willingness to follow his advice; a hostile meeting with Mr. Forbes' nephew, shooting him or getting shot myself, were alternatives not to be seriously thought of, though the half truth that lay in Barry's insinuation had roused my wrath. The banker and I talked for a considerable time—it might be an hour—on the evils of duelling, on the follies of his nephew, on the difficulties of getting him to do the right thing under present circumstances, and on the great wrong and injury he had inadvertently done to myself.

“If I had known anything of it in time,” said Forbes—“but one never knows what young men are after; and for that matter, I did not know of your engagement to the girl. Poor Miss Livey had written something to me of a difference between you and your uncle in America, about somebody you meant to marry there; but I never knew the particulars, till Watt Wilson told me this morning, after I got the Joyces' letter.

“It was a long engagement and a great

sacrifice, lad; enough to break an honest heart; but you have sense to get over it, Lucien. I know, from what Wilson told me, you loved the girl well; a sad and sore thing it is that true love should be so requited; but these are lessons that teach us to set our affections on things above, and life is full of them, in one shape or another; the moths corrupt and the thieves break through and steal whatever sort of treasures we lay up for ourselves on earth. After all, Lucien, there is a kind of comfort for you—you missed her well; the woman who could be so false before marriage, would not have been faithful after it; and though it is right and lawful that Charles should marry her, seeing he has committed himself, yet I find it hard to advise my nephew to take such a wife for better for worse; but we must do our duty and leave the rest to Providence. You bear it gallantly, lad, but the blow is heavy, to find deceit and falsehood where one had laid down love and truth so tried and tested as yours.”

I, could not look at the honest and kindly Scotchman sympathizing with what should have been but was not, and sat with my face averted, he probably thought to conceal my

emotion, till the rustle of a dress made me glance towards the door. Helen had entered so quietly that neither of us heard her; she had been listening, too, which was not like herself; and what could have passed between her and Barry that she stood leaning against the wall, her head bowed, and her face as white as paper. My first impulse was to run to her, but she gave me no time; the serious girl could always recover herself quickly; she came forward on the instant, saying:

“Mr. La Touche, I have come to request that you will make friends with Charles; he has promised to make all the amends in his power, and allowed me to say that he is sorry for his untrue and offensive words to you. You’ll make friends with him, Mr. La Touche; he is but a sailor and not very sensible.”

“I’ll make friends with any friend of yours, Miss Forbes; words are but wind, as the proverb says; I am only sorry to have lost my temper at such folly.”

“Right, lad, right,” said Forbes; and Helen, giving me one of her sunny smiles, ran out, and returned the next minute

with Charles Barry, looking very much softened.

“Uncle,” said he, “I have made up my mind to do what you call the right thing; cousin Helen has talked me into it—a woman can always talk me into anything, but I suppose it is proper—anyhow, I am going to do it; and I didn’t mean what I said, Mr. La Touche; it’s not to avoid a meeting, mind. I am afraid of no man; but you didn’t deserve to be so spoken to. Will you shake hands?”

“With all my heart,” said I.

And hands we did shake, to the evident delight of Helen and her father. I never saw their sober faces so lighted up.

Forbes commenced, and congratulated his nephew on the honest resolution he had come to, and the blessing that might be expected to follow on what he had admitted was so hard to advise, while Helen resumed her needlework with accustomed gravity, and after some more reconciling remarks, we changed the subject by common consent.

I stayed to supper, and got renewed credit for wisdom and patience in Notting Hill. Barry walked home with me, puffing his

cigar and chatting about all the news of the day. The Joyces brought Rosanna up from Gravesend, and had a very quiet wedding at their nearest church. Barry took her to the Isle of Wight to spend the honeymoon. On his return, I learned both from himself and the Forbes', that he had discovered all sorts of talent and perfections in her mind and manners.

Easy and good-natured, the man was likely to make a good husband, as the world goes, but the *Rattlesnake* was despatched to the coast of Africa to look after slavers; he went with it, of course, and Mrs. Barry remained at home with the Joyces, now in great exultation, though rather disappointed that they were not more noticed by the Forbes' and myself. I believe the neglect of the Notting Hill House people was entirely charged to Helen's account, and with some reason, for Miss Forbes was wisely prudent.

"The girl is Charles' wife, to be sure, our relation, in law," said Forbes one day to me, in one of our confidential discourses, "but Helen does not consider her a suitable associate. My daughter is discreet, Mr. La Touche, and has the clearest ideas of propriety: she knows there

is evil in the world, and does her part against it; you remember how she sat with us and helped to persuade Charles, in fact, gained him over to the right when we could not, but she avoids all countenancing of it, either in deed or appearance, and these Joyces have shown themselves anything but followers of whatsoever is honest, lovely, and of good report."

Forbes had a sort of pride in his daughter which I began to think justifiable. She had brought about the business which, in a manner, cleared my conscience, and saved Rosanna from what less charitable dames would think deserved consequences, though Barry did not approve of her after wisdom so highly as the banker. "Confound it," said he, when calling to return my loan, just before the *Rattlesnake* sailed, "she takes upon her to look down on my wife, and so does her father—the old man does everything that girl bids him—they do, Mr. La Touche, I know it, though of course they did not say so; it would not do with one of the Barrys of Howth, and you know she was the first hand aboard in making up the match; a right thing, I'll allow; anyhow it's done, and once on that tack nobody can get off it.

"But Helen might take Rosanna a little in

tow; in fact, I thought she would, being such a great Christian, and up to everything that's sensible. See if I will go to their dull Saturday dinners when I come back, if Mrs. Barry is not good enough to be invited; she is a deal prettier than cousin Helen, anyhow; just let her begin to give me good advice again! and wasn't I green, Mr. La Touche, to let out about the ten pounds? but it went against me, on account of what I borrowed it for, and I did think my uncle would never let me hear the end of it. However, by-gones are by-gones, you and I are good friends, I hope. I can't just expect you and your sister to receive Rosanna; she did not behave quite handsomely to you; but women, Mr. La Touche, were never to be trusted, except where they are not over pretty and are uncommon good, like my cousin Helen. I have a notion you and her will make it up some day."

CHAPTER IX.

LUCIEN LOOKS UP THE BRASS KEY.

To return to my own peculiar story. I was now free—free to go to Old Broad-street and the villa where my heart had been always going, in spite of honest striving and hardly-done duty. Yes, I was free. Though deeply sympathized with in Notting Hill House, Miss Forbes and her father thought it necessary not to refer to Barry or the Joyces in my presence; the banker talked in a more lively manner; Helen sang more Scotch songs, and told me more about Madame Palivez's approaching marriage than ever, expressly to cheer up my spirits, and blunt the edge of disappointment and regret.

At home, Rhoda almost admired me for patience, prudence, and all the cardinal virtues that man could show under such a heavy trial; and I felt my liberty, yet did not rejoice in it.

The case of conscience was settled, cancelled, and wiped out for ever : Rosanna was the sinner, and not I. We were parted for all time ; I had paid for my folly in ever meeting or getting engaged ; and now there was another engagement pressing on my memory with a heavier but far different weight. The lawful impediment was removed, but the unsolvable warning, the threatening mystery remained. Night and morning I looked out for a sign or a message—any apology for getting into her presence after so long a delay, and under my peculiar circumstances, which Madame must know, for Esthers did. There came none ; and still the little sense that was left me said it was best so—best to get and keep clear of such an anomalous association ; leading one knew not whither, surrounded by unknown risks, carried on in secret, and holding in the background some mysterious tale which seemed to blend with the inexplicable part of my own family history. I was warned, but the warning was not a sufficient barrier against the strong inclination. For honour and conscience sake I could resolve to keep safe distance—I think could have kept the resolution, too ; but not for prudence, not for self-saving, or taking care of—the bondage was too firmly rivetted.

She did not send for, she did not meet me ; I knew she was occupied with a coming-on wedding. I must expect to be consoled with on my own disappointment, but I could wait no longer without seeing her ; and while Barry and his bride were enjoying their honeymoon in the Isle of Wight, I took the brass key out of its hidden corner one morning, looked at it all day where Esthers could not see me in the office, and when the bank closed, instead of going home, I made my way through the old overgrown churchyard to the small door in the wall, turned the key in the lock, and admitted myself to the magnificent conservatory within. It was all in bloom and fragrance, as I had seen it at first ; and no sight or sound of life reached me as I walked up the marble stair, through the ante-room, and into the great saloon where I had found her ; and there Madame Palivez sat, I think, on the very same sofa, almost in the centre, in the same dress of purple velvet and gold buttons—her winter trim ; and all the place was lighted up with wax candles and classically-shaped lamps, for the dull November night had fallen heavy and damp on London.

“ Ah ! welcome, my friend,” she said, extending her hand with a smile that made the room

look brighter; “you have come to see me at last. I knew you would, or I should have gone to see you. Sit down, Lucien, and give an account of yourself. What kept you away so long, when you knew I was at home, and saw me so plainly at the review?”

“I did not like to intrude upon you, Madame, as I understood you had more engaging company.”

Was it craft or folly made me say that?

“What company, Lucien?”

“Why, the Russian prince—Prince Galatzin, whom they say you are going to marry.”

“Who told you that? Come out with it!” How mischievously amused she seemed at my hesitation. “Was it the Joyces?”

“No Madame; it was Miss Forbes, and she heard it from Mr. Esthers.”

Madame laughed, but she was not amused now.

“It was a very natural mistake for him. There are matters about our business which the Palivezi have never permitted their employed people, however confidential, to know. Prince Galatzin’s affair with me is one of that kind; and I tell you, as a friend, it regards money, and not matrimony. With the last mentioned

I have no concern, Lucien, and never will, having passed the time when one might be foolish enough to get so involved."

"Do you think marriage such a folly, then?"

"Not for all. It is one of the world's institutions, requisite for many reasons; but for myself it would be folly, and worse. I have not led a woman's life; I do not think as a woman; I have been accustomed to steer by my own judgment, to consult my own inclinations, crossed or modified only by the laws of society and the powers of nature. I am averse to counsel, control, or responsibility; and I know of no consideration for which I would barter the ease and freedom of the single state."

"You are not of Dr. Johnson's opinion, who thought that marriage had many pains, but the single life no pleasures."

"Dr. Johnson, though a capable man in many respects, a good scholar, and something of a wit, was no philosopher; besides, he had a weakness or virtue—I know not which to call it; it has the effect of binding one to their species, because it makes one most dependent on them—I mean that intensely social or domestic turn of mind which made it impossible for him to live alone. Dr. Johnson shared that with the

greater part of mankind; certainly, no advantage to the individual, but necessary, I suppose, to the well-being, if not to the existence, of society; families owe their continuance to it as well as to less discussable causes; from it arise communities, clubs, and quarrels. I am either worse or better off than Dr. Johnson in this respect; I have learned to live without my species.

“As servants, correspondents, and acquaintances, which may be all classed in the service here, I find them useful; but in my mental life, which is the only being at home we have, I can live alone, and have done so for years. You are the nearest approach to a friend I ever had, and I want no nearer. Remember, I don’t say that you and I may not know each other better—that is altogether a different affair; but as regards this marriage business, it is not for me, nor I for it. The great house of the Palivezi, with all its pride and banking, terminates in me.”

“May you not change your mind, Madame? most ladies do, they say.” I was getting very bold; but she looked me sadly in the face, and said—“No, Lucien, I may not. There were causes that made me come to that resolution

early; that made me what I am with thinking over and searching into them. My heart got schooled down or up, my friend, to counting costs and reckoning on consequences, till the life and feeling wore out of it, and I am a capable banker."

"But why do you reckon only on risks and evils?"

"Because there was nothing else to be reckoned on," she interrupted, with wild earnestness, that grew more desperately miserable as she spoke. "Nothing else for me and mine. We have suffered through ten generations, and still the sin and the sorrow descends through all the Palivez branches till the tree once so fair and spreading has come to one bough, waiting for the stroke, and the wealth and honours which so many envy, not knowing their fearful price, must go to strangers."

"Is Esthers the next heir, failing yourself, Madame?" said I, in hopes of getting at the clue.

"Esthers!" she said, with a glance of queenly scorn, which made the lady all herself again. "He is illegitimate, and not a Palivez. Our bank and business goes, after my decease, to the great Smyrna house of Comenzoni, whose line is

almost as ancient and princely as our own, and was connected with ours before"—and she pointed to the portrait beside the veiled Nemesis—"before one of my ancestors married that Tartar princess, the last heiress to the throne of Kasan, whom Ivan the Terrible had to dispose of, and did it to our cost. But, Lucien"—how suddenly she could change her look and subject—"in all this talk for or against matrimony I am forgetting to say how much I regret your own difficulties—disappointment I ought to say—and shameful behaviour of that girl."

I had forgotten it, too; but Madame proceeded—"I have been suspecting it was that kept you away from me. Lucien, had I known anything about it you should have got early information, but Esthers kept it from me." There was deep fierce wrath in her eyes which could not or would not be uttered. "Of course I never inquire into their family affairs, but I wish I had for your sake. She furnishes a good example—I mean the girl Rosanna—of what one so often gets convinced of—namely, the impossibility of fathoming fools. Simpletons, whom one thinks one can read through and through like a primer, with nothing but

common-places in them from beginning to end, suddenly turn up some aspect of character, some capability of going or doing wrong, one never dreamt of. I had set her down for the very thing that suited you. You thought the same, no doubt, and lost and endeavoured far more than she was worth at her best interpretation, and this is what noble, conscientious acting comes to in such a world."

"Never mind," said I, "the discovery out-balances the loss."

She fixed her eyes on me as if with a keen determination to read me through like a primer, and said — "Lucien, you did not love that girl. At first I know you did. No man would make the sacrifice you made, except for love as sincere and honourable as ever romantic youth believed in; but you did not, at the last. I know it by your look and by your tone. Don't redden, my friend, the thing was made to change everywhere except among turtle-doves, and that according to the poets, who, by-the-bye, seldom imitate the example they sing so often. You have seen somebody else since the vow was made in Baltimore."

Had she put the question, or anything like it at that moment, clerk as I was, my courage or

my folly was up, and I would have told her all—who it was that had come between my heart and the girl I had done so much for—who it was that had broken away the faith and constancy herself had praised and partly rewarded—but Madame gave me no opportunity. With the last word, she threw herself back on the sofa in that careless abandonment to mirth or amusement which I have never seen in another so far out of childhood, and laughed with all her heart.

“It is well, my friend, it is well,” she said—“all things change, and nothing so quickly as the heart of man. What a foundation it is to build one’s happiness on! but why didn’t you let me know that when we talked of your wedding nearly six months ago? Were you too proud or too honourable? How lucky that she should have proved faithless! She would have proved the same if you had stood as firm as the everlasting rock, which I might have known to be an impossibility. Rosanna was not the woman to retain you. The Joyces have got Barry to marry her, they tell me. That was more than could have been expected.”

“It was Miss Forbes that reasoned him into it,” said I, determined that Helen should get her due.

“The more fool he to be reasoned,” said Madame. “I have seen this Barry, and he looks a simpleton.”

“Do you think that simpletonship? Had not the man a right? Was it not his imperative duty to marry the girl he had seduced?”

I spoke out in one of those sudden revulsions of feeling which so often came over me in converse with her. It went against my nature to hear the woman speak so gracelessly out of the security of her social position and hardness of heart. How it was contrasted in my memory with the gentle charity, and pure warm sympathies of Helen Forbes.

But Madame smiled on me, half-kindly, half-scornfully, and said—

“Lucien, my friend, you and I have no time for the little shams which everybody feels bound to assist in, and nobody is cheated by. Rosanna Joyce seduced herself; so do most women who get into that mischief. I grant you, society makes it a greater mischief to them than to their companions of your own sex—an absurdity which, doubtless, serves some purpose or necessity in nature, because it is universal.”

“And therefore must be just,” said I.

“No, my friend, it must not; there is no such

thing as justice, except in the theories of philosophers or the dreams of poets. Everywhere the strong pray on the weak, the crafty on the simple; and whatever rule people can make or discover to suit their interests or inclinations, they call that just. But to return to the case in hand. Your pious friend, Miss Forbes," and she spoke with a slight sneer, "has shown Mr. Barry his duty and obligation to marry Sally Joyce's sister, and he has fulfilled them. Well, what are the consequences? Mr. Barry, having made such an alliance, will sink to the level of his wife; every man does so more or less; it is one of the curious effects of your social system. He will lose caste—lose self-respect, probably, such sort as he has—lose the on-getting impulse, slide down to the Joyces, if not below them. They are proud of the naval officer, of course; they will turn him to every possible account, but not one to his own advantage. He will have Sally and Jeremy, as well as Rosanna, hanging to his skirts, though with little credit and less comfort in the retinue; and his excellent uncle and cousin in Notting Hill House, being prudent and pious, will keep particularly clear of the concern they have reasoned him into."

“ Barry should have kept out of it himself in the first instance.”

“ So he should ; but Barry was idle, and at Baltimore once, like other people.”—What a thorough knowledge she had of the whole story ! —“ Remember, I do not say there was an atom of resemblance more. You are simple, Lucien ; but not in the same fashion. By-the-bye, I wonder he had not fixed on his cousin—the good, if not fair Helen, her father’s heiress, and your special friend. You need not take the trouble of denial, Lucien ; I know it was not for her that your heart fell from its allegiance. You are a man, even as others—might marry Miss Forbes, I dare say, if opportunity offered, and the old man was agreeable. But you did not forget Rosanna on her account. She is good but not pretty ; and no goodness, not even talent, can make up for the want of beauty in a woman. You are sitting there convinced, I see, and letting me do all the talking—from the feeling that no greater service can be done to an elderly lady, I suppose. But now that this little difficulty is over and Rosanna disposed of, when may I expect to hear of your taking the present elect for better for worse ? That astonishment is well put on, Lucien ; I

am only asking when you intend to get married."

"I will never get married, Madame." Nothing more would come out.

"Yes, you will; you must, Lucien. Nature made you a domestic and family man; you never could live by and for yourself alone, as I do. Remember, that implies no deficiency of character, but the contrary; all reformers, all improvers who have made any practical impression on their times and on the world, have been of the same order. The single and solitary—I mean those so inclined, like myself—have not sufficient sympathy with their species, not a sufficient bond to them, or interest in their well-being, to take such trouble and risk. It is to you domestic men that the world owes everything, as well as its on-going. You will, and you must marry, Lucien; things will never go well with you till then. But I know it will happen some day; and as I have passed the time for the like, I won't pry into your heart's secret. Look at this picture I have bought; they tell me it is Ione looking out for Paris, who will come to her no more, for he has run away with Helen; you understand. The artist seems to have caught the spirit of our old mythology."

The picture to which she pointed was that of a beautiful wood nymph, looking down a grassy slope from the edge of a thick forest. There was a perspective of valleys far below, a flashing river, and fair city towers; but no figure except the solitary wood nymph, beautiful, slender, and light as the breeze, but looking down the valleys with a gaze so earnest, and yet so hopeless, that the onlooker felt it was for one whom she would see no more.

It turned our conversation into far different channels. There was no more of Ellen Forbes, the Joyces, Barry, or myself, but a deal of talk, artistic and literary, mostly done by Madame. I had got a habit of listening; perhaps she liked that best.

At any rate, the bewilderment, the strangeness, and tumult of my inward thoughts passed away, or settled down. I had been about to tell my secret—it is an impulse which seems natural to man—but the opportunity passed; it had not been done.

In my sober senses I would never attempt to do it; and Madame and I were back on our old footing, with the warning mystery still in the background, but no broken vow to rise in judgment against me.

“ You will come and see me often,” she said, “ now that we understand each other better, and you know that I am not about to become the Princess Galatzin. By-the-bye, it was Esthers told that to the Forbes’ ; he visits them a good deal of late.”

“ I believe they are more intimate than they used to be.”

“ All the worse: perhaps I should not exactly say so, Lucien, to another, but I know Esthers. He has been long in our employment; my father promised my uncle on—on his death-bed, that he never should be parted with. I feel bound to fulfil his promise; otherwise, Lucien, he might not be continued about me and my business. The man is trustworthy, in the legal acceptance of the word; but he was born under one of those unlucky stars which give men more craft than good sense or good fortune. Esthers is not lucky for himself—not lucky for anyone who may be concerned with him; and he has a fatal readiness for concerning himself with other people’s affairs: but this is spoken between you and I.” She laid her hand on my shoulder, and looked me earnestly in the face. “ Was it he that gave you to understand his expectations of being heir to the Palivezi?”

“No, Madame, I cannot say that Esthers ever did so.”

“What led you to suppose it, then?”

“You had mentioned that he was your cousin.”

“He is my uncle’s illegitimate son; at least, Alexis Palivez believed so. I regret the fact but cannot alter it; and as I told you, our inheritance goes to the house of Comenzoni. The settlement was made with my concurrence, or rather by my advice; but Esthers is ignorant of it, and I expect that he will remain so, for the fact has been mentioned to nobody but you. I know you to be discreet,” she continued in reply to my declaration that none of our private conversation should ever be repeated—“I know you to be discreet, or we should not be on the terms we are. But, remember, you will come and see me oftener than you have done; I will never try to worm your secret out; there is no obstacle in your way to the altar now, I hope; it might be well to take time, lest your mind should change again. You needn’t look angry or ashamed, I am not sure which it is; minds were made for changing; but you will come and see me? And listen: your sister will be wondering where you go; she is alone now and

will miss you more—for I expect you to come regularly on the Sunday evenings—it is due to her sense and affection to tell her where you spend your time. I give you leave to explain the case exactly as it stands; if the girl does not understand it she will give no trouble on that subject, or any other; Rhoda was made for getting safely and easily through life. Tell her all; tell her what a strange woman I am, that I took a fancy to you, if you like—but not how you served me, Lucien, not how you saved my life. I have your promise on that, and I hold by it, for strong and sad reasons, not to expose a family to questions or gossip about our employed people; you are discreet, you will understand me.” .

I did understand; but it was as usual, that Madame Palivez had something to conceal from me whom she thought so discreet, and called her friend; but I promised to tell and to keep according as she directed, and went home reconciled to seeing her in private, to hearing half secrets, to being often shocked by her cynical and unanswerable remarks, and being always charmed and drawn on like a man thoroughly in bondage.

The confession may seem strange, and not very creditable to my sense or spirit, but it is an

honest one, and the facts had extenuating if not justifying causes.

I loved Madame Palivez, not as I had loved Rosanna in the first and best days of our Baltimore acquaintance, not as men loved ordinary women, but as Thomas the Rhymer may have loved the Fairy Queen.

She reigned over my heart and mind in right of an inherent royalty, often questioned, often disputed, but never to be denied.

Whatever the lady was, or might have been, in an ethical point of view, there were in her those imperial elements of command and fascination which make their possessors leaders and prophets to the rest of mankind.

She did not mingle with my daily life. I saw hers only by glimpses sufficient to show me how great was its difference from my own. But all the thoughts that rose above daily work and care, my perceptions of art, of letters, and of nature all went up to her; sometimes reflecting, sometimes disputing her views, but always occupied with, or about Madame Palivez.

And, therefore, as the Elfin Queen came to the Rhymer in the deep green wood, with wondrous wisdom and with wondrous beauty, telling of the lovelier freer life of fairyland, so the

charms which nature had bestowed so liberally on the Grecian lady, the grandeur, the luxury, the taste which surrounded her, took hold of my imagination, as much as her intellectual powers subjected my reason.

CHAPTER X.

ESTHERS MAKES GOOD HIS FOOTING AT THE
FORBES'.

I HAD some difficulty in telling my sister the part of the tale assigned to her hearing. My confidence in Rhoda's good sense, my natural desire to hear her opinion on matters which puzzled and half frightened me, would have prompted me to tell the whole story of Madame's friendship, but that was forbidden; I had given my promise, and in spite of every good reason to the contrary, Rhoda must hear but a part.

That part was necessary, as Bolton-row no longer furnished an apology for my evenings out, as Madame had anticipated; did she ever forget the stray end of any clue which curiosity might get hold of, and trace out the windings of the labyrinth?

It was my expectation that Rhoda would be so exalted at my promotion to such superior so-

ciety, and probably—with the hopes which a sister in her position might entertain for a brother taken into private friendship by his wealthy, fair, and fashionable employer—that all her discretion ought to be enlisted in the keeping of the secret from Watt Wilson, the Masons, and the rest of her circle.

But when, after proper preparation, I unfolded the fact to her at our small tea-table, Rhoda looked at me with a long-sighted, anxious glance, laid down her tea-pot, and said—

“ Well, Lucien, she is a great lady, uncommon handsome, and very rich ; in course it’s remarkable good of her to take such a liking to you, and it isn’t every young man that gets into such fine company ; but somehow—you’ll not be angry at my saying it, Lucien—I would rather you were going anywhere else. I have seen that lady often looking at this house when she rode by ; my aunt that’s gone used to notice it, and said there was something strange about her for all her beauty. I dreamt of her once, coming here and taking you away in her carriage, but somehow my mind told me it was for no good ; and Hannah Clark has taken to spaeing now, as all them that are deaf and dumb do by nature, and she always spaes that you are to marry a rich

lady, but she says there is blood in the way which you must step over.”

“Nonsense, Rhoda,” said I, but my hand shook so that the knife I was cutting bread with fell out of it; “Hannah Clark knows no more about the future than you do; and as for marrying a rich lady, I have no chance of that. Madame Palivez has taken a fancy to talk with me in her leisure evenings; being a clerk in her bank, it is prudent and suitable for me to serve and please the lady; but when she thinks of changing her condition—which Madame says she never will—there are Russian princes and English dukes who would not be too high matches for the heiress of the great house of Palivez.”

“In course, Lucien, it may be all nonsense I am thinking, but you’ll allow it isn’t every day that a great lady takes such fancies for talking with a young man in such a confident way. I’ll warrant it is all friendship, and very prudent and suitable, as you say, to serve and please her; it may get you on in the bank to be head clerk, or more; but, Lucien, if she ever wants you to do anything not right or honest—mind, I don’t say she will, but the like has happened, and the business is strange—just remember that the friendship of God is more worth than the love

of any 'arthly lady, however rich or handsome she may be."

I assured Rhoda there was no danger of my being wanted to do anything not right or honest ; Madame had means enough to bribe more ready hands if she required any such service ; we had no right to think ill of any person who had not shown themselves ill inclined, merely because their ways or humours were unlike our own.

Madame Palivez was peculiar, but very sensible, and of great learning ; we must remember, too, that she was of foreign birth and breeding, but all the world knew how upright and honourable the dealings of the Palivez had always been ; her name and fame stood as high as those of her ancestors ; as for her fancy to see me on spare evenings, it was but the whim of a lady of fashion, tired of gay company and the whirl of West-end life ; it probably would not last long, and the wisest thing we could do was to keep the matter between ourselves, that people might not misunderstand or make a tale about it.

Rhoda saw the wisdom of those conclusions, and seemed reasoned out of her own sinister impressions, but her word went with me in my goings to Broad-street, mingled with the vainly

guessed at mystery which enveloped the lady of the bank ; and Hannah Clark's spaeing of the rich marriage, and the blood that was to be stepped over, would come, till I got ashamed of thinking so superstitiously.

But time went on its course, and I went on mine—to Notting Hill House on Saturday evenings, to Rhoda all the rest of the week, and to the back rooms behind the bank as sure as the Sunday twilight fell. Those were the hours looked for and counted on out of all the seven days—the time I lived and thought for ; the sayings, doings, and glances that passed in them, occupied me over ledger and account book—at the fire-side, where my sister sat opposite mending stockings ; in Notting Hill House, where Helen played and sang, and her father talked of business and his growing friendship with Esthers.

“ We have great hopes of his becoming a Christian,” said Helen, one evening when we happened to get on the subject of my manager. “ Don't you think we may entertain something of the kind. He comes here regularly on Sunday evenings ; papa does not like to receive people on Sundays, but Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath, and he has no other time, so we

thought it the best arrangement, and Mr. Esthers has quite fallen into our ways; he reads sermons beautifully, and is certainly getting over his prejudices; papa was quite struck with his borrowing the proof catechism, and he has promised to read through the Westminster Confession, and search the Scriptures for himself."

I thought of Madame's observations as she spoke; the gentle, pious Helen was, like other good people, easily deceived or flattered through their favourite opinions, but I knew the manager well enough to be aware that his going to Notting Hill House regularly on Sundays, reading sermons beautifully, borrowing the proof catechism, and giving them great hopes of him, was not without substantial motives. Esthers might get converted, but he was steering on a different tack, and I thought it but fair and honest to give my friends something of a warning.

"If Esthers has taken so strongly to religion it is not what I should expect of him; his regard for it, Christian or Jewish, was never considerable; for all the time he spends in the synagogue on Saturday, there would be plenty for him to come here; in short, Miss Forbes, it may not be charitable, but I can't help suspect-

ing Esthers' seriousness; he is cunning by nature, and may have some motive for pleasing you and your papa."

The last of my words were not well chosen; they smote on Helen's pride—the serious young lady had some, though of a quiet, unobtrusive kind.

"I should be sorry, Mr. La Touche, to pass such a judgment on one who appears to be seeking for truth. Mr. Esthers has shown himself very friendly to papa in the way of business; very sensible and well inclined in his conversation with us; he may be cunning as you say, for of course you know him best, but it is not permitted for us to search into motives which have not been shown; and if we can be the humble instruments of directing him to the true light, it is an opportunity which no Christian should lose," and Helen looked at me in the admonishing manner with which she used to look at Charles Barry.

I did not venture any further remonstrance; Esthers had made his footing good; I had nothing tangible to allege against him to father or daughter; there was evidently a change in the mind of the latter since she thought it uncharitable and very wrong, but did not like the

manager. Yet it was Helen's pious prejudices, her philanthropy, perhaps her spiritual pride, that were enlisted, and not her fancy or feelings. Some further attempts at putting the Forbes' on their guard, which I made with equally small success, satisfied me that I might be misunderstood, and probably disliked for my pains. But nothing could be done in the way of moving Esthers out of their good graces. As for him, he neither blazoned his triumph nor made a secret of the intimacy. Having always given me to understand that he was an old and familiar acquaintance of the family, he spoke of them now as he had ever done: there was the same smirk at the mention of Helen, the same friendly knowingness regarding her father—in short, Mr. Esthers was *au fait* in everything about them, except my goings to Notting Hill House, which he utterly ignored and passed over, as something which ought not to exist.

My visits to the back room in Broad-street would have been more against his mind had Esthers been aware of them. That was plain to me, though I never could say how it became so. He never spoke of Madame Palivez, even in business matters, if it were possible to avoid the subject. She rarely spoke of him, and never ex-

pressly warned me against letting the manager know of our private association; but the same instinct or perception by which I discovered his wish to keep us strangers, also made me aware of her anxiety to keep our friendship a secret from the manager. Being loyal to her and our singular compact, I took all possible precautions not to be seen or heard tell of in my Sunday goings; and rather acquiesced in the favour Esthers had found at Notting Hill House, as it took him so far out of the way.

CHAPTER XI.

SALLY AGAIN.

THE Sundays came and went, and my time was reckoned by them, for their evenings took me to Madame Palivez. Many a discussion we had, many a long and friendly talk of things on which our views happened to agree, and I thought the number of them increased every day. We were certainly becoming friends in the very best sense of the term; her superior knowledge—which had a range of arts and letters wider than that of any mind with which mine had ever come into contact—her large experience of the world in business and society, her fine perceptions, clear judgment, and native wit, made Madame instructive and entertaining company for any young man with a brain. Mine was given to her; even where our opinions differed farthest, I felt my mind sliding away

into her views imperceptibly; finding her arguments not to be answered, I began to accept them, however contrary to my early education, or my best convictions.

An hour's conversation with Madame on any moral question, sent me home doubting everything that I had believed or hoped in; and every day made her appear to be more in the right and myself more her disciple. I know now, and knew then, in my wiser moments, which, indeed, were growing fewer, that it was the man's folly and not the man's reason on which her teaching had power. We were growing good friends; she called me nothing but Lucien, she told me passages of her early travels, of her early education, which had been at a Greek convent on the shores of the Black Sea—I think it was in the Crimea, though Madame never named the locality—and gave me accounts of more than one formal proposal for heart and hand made by Russian nobles and Greek bankers.

The disclosures were generally by way of illustrating some phase of life or character of which we happened to converse. They were always free and easy, Madame had no special interest in any affair of the kind of which I was permitted

to hear ; she had told me I was her first and only friend, and gradually the foolish hope began to take possession of me that I might be something more.

It was not the fashion of Mayfair or the wealth of Broad-street that glittered in my eyes and dazzled them ; as I have already said, it was the woman herself that led me captive. Apart from her position and surroundings, Madame Palivez would have been the same to my heart and memory. In the midst of her luxurious apartments, with so many objects of art and taste about her, so many evidences of princely fortune, and the use and wont of it, I could imagine her disencumbered of all, with no possession but her knowledge, her talents, and her beauty, and myself as deeply devoted to her service as ever.

There were times when I left her, smiling good night, with the firm clasp of her snowy hand still tingling in my own, when I paused in the lamplit street, and wished from the depths of my heart—or my folly—that some turn of Fortune's wheel might send the Palivez bank to what my American friends used to call eternal smash, that I might thereby have the chance of showing its fair and proud lady how truly I was her servant. I could have said, in that case,

what could never be uttered while I was the English clerk, and she was the head of that great house; my pride, my spirit, my sense of all that was honourable, made me lock up that secret in my breast.

Madame Palivez had chosen me for her private friend, received me alone, talked with me freely and familiarly, but never gave me the slightest reason to imagine that she entertained any warmer feeling. To one so clear, keen, and not over-charitable in her judgment of men and motives, would it be possible to show my heart and not be suspected of a selfish design?

That alone was sufficient to keep me silent and discreet; I would not have incurred her contempt for the world's wealth, and she had manifestly come to some conclusion in her own mind regarding my inconstancy to Rosanna, for she never returned to the subject, nor showed any curiosity on the point of my second choice.

Perhaps it had slipped out of her mind with bank affairs or some weighty considerations which seemed to be pressing on her as the year wore towards Christmas. I observed her looking more grave and preoccupied at times when I entered. In the midst of our conversation she would fall into a brown, or rather black study.

Whatever was the subject, it seemed to be a dark one, and there were occasions when I thought, from her look and manner, that she had something particular to say, which was always put back and never said. Could it be that Fortune had heard my foolish prayers? Had things gone vitally wrong with the bank, and was Madame getting into difficulties?

Everybody who ought to know, and whom I covertly examined—Mr. Forbes, Watt Wilson, and other competent authorities—assured me that the house of Palivez was in a most prosperous condition. Madame was the queen of business, and nothing could exceed the safe and profitable conduct of her affairs. Yet she looked unaccountably troubled, and particularly so on one Sunday evening towards the end of December. It was a season that used to come with sad and serious memories to myself at the Baltimore school, and in my uncle's counting-house. They came to Rhoda still, and to me, when I sat with her by our quiet fireside on the outskirts of London, for at that period of the year ruin had fallen on our old house in Armagh, through the unexplained disappearance of our elder brother.

Well, Madame had been grave, thoughtful,

and restless that evening, and when I rose to bid her good night, she said, "Lucien, this day week will be Christmas Eve, according to your Latin computation. I have private reasons for retiring to my villa then. Many a year has passed since I received any one on that day, but I will receive you if you come,"—what a softened, confiding look there was in her eyes!—"but remember, you may not find me the best of company. There are recollections that come to me with the anniversaries of family events, and make one think of the Pandora's box, with no hope at the bottom of it."

"You are always the best of company, Madame, and I'll come if you allow me." I would have said more, but she stopped me with—"Come, then, my flattering friend; but I have warned you, and you won't be surprised if I am not quite myself next Sunday. I know you have sense enough for that, Lucien;" and Madame dismissed me with a kind but hasty good night.

The hour was earlier than usual; to say the truth, my visits to Broad-street were generally prolonged late enough, but it was not yet eleven by the clock. The night was clear and frosty, and I took a sort of circuit home by way of thinking

over what had passed in the back rooms, and composing my own mind. What were the family events she had to recollect at the very same season of the year which brought such strange and sad remembrances to myself and sister? They must have been of a similar character, if not still darker and more fearful than our own. There were shadows of strange terror passing over her face when she spoke of them, and nobody had been received on their anniversaries for many a year.

I was thinking the matter over, and pacing slowly through Berkeley-square. Its aristocratic quiet made it a suitable place for such a study. There were few lights in the shut-up houses of the absent fashionables who then resided there. There was nobody to be seen or heard but the watchmen, who still went their rounds and called the hour, when a shrill, sharp voice, keeping up a continuous fire of quarrelsome discourse, came along the square behind me, and turning under the nearest lamp, I recognized in a tired-looking, battered group, Sally Joyce, with Jeremy, and Mrs. Barry.

My once intended sister-in-law was scolding with more than common ardour. They had been out for the day's pleasure, missed the early

returning boats, had to wait for the latest, got into a quarrel with the hackney coachman who was driving them home, alighted in consequence, and were now walking the rest of the distance. 'I learned all that from Sally's lecture. She was explicit on the facts, and also on their having run to their last penny, and never being able to get on in this fashion, if those that had a right did not do something for them ; but nobody need think she would be boxed off into the country.

As Miss Joyce came nearer, I discovered what seemed to be a new feature of her practice. She had had recourse to something stronger than tea by way of supporting her spirits under the afflictions of the evening. Was the constitutionally troublesome lady following her mother's example, as chronicled by Madame Palivez ?

But they were coming nearer. I did not wish to meet, yet there was no being able to avoid them without appearing to do so, which was beneath my dignity, so I walked quietly on in the hopes that they would have the sense to pass me in silence. I was already recognized by the lamp-light. I saw Rosanna shrinking back, exactly as she had done by my side at the sight of Charles Barry. Jeremy also lingered behind, but the

elder sister, as if seized by a sudden inspiration for mischief, dashed right in front of me, crying —“ Good evening to you, Mr. La Touche. You are late going home on a Sunday evening, and out of the way, too; but I suppose you have been in Curzon-street, though the house is kept closed and dark, to make people believe she is out of town.”

The words made me start back. Was Sally Joyce, then, aware of my secret visits to Madame Palivez? Well I knew it was nothing but the stimulus she had taken that made her betray that knowledge so openly. It had overcome the native cunning of Esthers' half-sister, and given the loose rein to all her love of meddling and importance.

“ Ha, ha!” she continued, with a malicious giggle—“ you see I know it all. She wants to get me boxed off to the country, but I won't go. I'll stay in London, and in Mayfair—fashionable society is necessary to my health and spirits. I won't smother myself in a dull corner for her, and the secrets she wants kept. Let her pay for the keeping of them, I say; she is rich. What does she mean, I'd like to know, putting us off with that paltry annuity? Tell her I can't live on it. I must get something decent,

or I'll let the world hear what I know about her."

"Allow me to pass, Miss Joyce. I wish to have no conversation with you, or any of your family."

"Oh, you don't!"—and she stepped more directly before me—"you have got too grand for us since she took you in hand; but you needn't think you are going to get her and her bank. It is only just to pass the time she minds you at all; but tell her what I said."

"I will tell her nothing of the kind," and I stepped quickly by; but Sally had seized the skirt of my coat, and thrusting forward her face with an indescribable grin of insane malice, she said, in a hissing whisper. "Tell her to recollect Christmas Eve, and what happened on it in Dublin."

I disengaged myself with a sudden spring, darted across the square, and left her calling to Jeremy and Rosanna to come along, for it was not respectable to be so late out.

All the way home, the words hissed out between Sally's teeth sounded in my ears, and shook my mind with a tempest of thoughts: "Tell her to recollect Christmas Eve, and what happened on it in Dublin." The look with

which they were spoken was insane as well as malicious; yet there must have been a terrible meaning in them. They had to do with the family events which made Madame retire to her villa, and receive no one for so many years except myself, whom she had partly asked to come.

Had Esthers made a half discovery, or had Sally's own crazed mind, in its excitement, hit on the subject of my secret visits, though not on their true localities? There were endeavours being made to get her out of London. I remembered the allusion to a well-managed private asylum. There must be—there were motives for such an anxiety to put her out of the way; it was not all madness nor malice. Sally knew more than was safe for the lady of the bank; but how could I mention the subject to Madame? Yet it was a friend's part to warn her against Sally's tongue; it could speak out to others under the same influence. But Madame had not chosen to trust me even with the existence of her secret. She had allowed me to know that her life had dark places—that her memory had some heavy burden, and her days some clouds of fear; but she had studiously endeavoured to keep me in the dark with

regard to her interest in the Joyces. It was only for their own sakes that she took any notice of their family concerns ; and might not I be considered prying or meddling if I appeared to know the contrary ?—might I not get mixed up and set down with the Joyces by entering on the subject at all ?

Then came the stranger, blacker thoughts, not to be put in any form of words, but they regarded my family's ruin and the long-lost Raymond. "Tell her to recollect Christmas Eve, and what happened in Dublin ;" the time was a few days later than his disappearance eighteen years ago. How long had Madame received nobody, and retired to her most private retreat on Christmas Eve ?

The idea was not to be entertained ; I shook it off as one awakening shakes off nightmare, and sped home to No. 9. But all night long the far past time of trouble was mingling with the scenes and people of the present, inexplicably and impossibly, as things blend in dreams. We were all at home again in our old house at Armagh—father, mother, and young sisters so long dead and gone, and Miss Livey, whom I had laid down in the Hammersmith churchyard—all waiting for Raymond's home-coming that

Sunday night ; and the Palivez bank in Broad-street had somehow got next door. I was in its splendid back rooms ; Madame was making the compact with me, but Mr. Forbes and Melrose Morton were witnesses ; and Sally Joyce looked in through the myrtles and orange-trees of the conservatory, with the very same look she had given me in Berkeley-square, and somebody came through the shrubs behind her, whom I knew to be my brother Raymond.

All the week I puzzled myself whether I should tell Madame of Sally's talk or not. Could I have mentioned the matter to Rhoda, there might have been help in her sound sense and honest counsel ; but my sister had a sort of superstition against Madame Palivez. It could be nothing else, for she had no knowledge of all that surprised and puzzled me about the lady ; but Rhoda had dreamt about her brother being taken away, and for no good. She had wished I was going anywhere else, and warned me against being wanted to do anything that was not right. If I mentioned the interview with Sally, her suspicions would take the shape my own thoughts had taken ; Rhoda would come at once to conclusions, which, besides being improbable, were intolerable to my mind. My own

secret would be in danger of coming out ; I could not trust even my sister with it, much less with that which concerned Madame.

However the latter had chosen to conceal her transactions with the Joyces from me, it was neither loyal nor honest to withhold the warning. How best to avoid the appearance of ferreting out was the difficulty, chiefly because I would have given the world, had it been mine, to find the very blackest bottom of the secret—for black I knew it must be—and there seemed a chance of coming to it now ; so, after long deliberation, I resolved to let things take their course, and find some fitting opportunity and suitable manner of intimating the fact.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT OF MYSTERY.

ON Sunday night, according to appointment, I made my way to the villa, through a dull misty evening, breezeless, and heavy with threatening rain; it was some time after dark, my sister and Hannah Clark had gone to chapel, I saw the lights in Notting Hill House as I passed by the path up the stream; Esthers was there, but could learn nothing of my goings through the outer darkness, and it was the same day of the year in which I sat in the Greek coffee-house and heard Watt Wilson relate the strange tale of my family to him.

Now I was going to visit his lady-superior, the heiress of all the Palivez, in the solemn retirement of her villa, to which the remembrance of family events made her retreat on Christmas Eve. What a dreary and desolate

hermitage the place looked when I reached it in the midst of the wintry woodland!

How different from its summer aspect was the solitary foreign-looking house, on which the full moon now shone out with a red and lurid light through the heavy mist, standing there in the midst of the damp grey hollow, overshadowed by leafless trees and sombre evergreens, its roses and jessamine gone, its windows shut up so close that no light of fire or candle was to be seen, and not a sound in or about it, but a low hollow moan of waking winds, or far-off waters in the heart of the old park!

I tried my key, and the garden gate opened, as the door in the churchyard wall had done; but some signal of my coming was given within—a bell seemed to tinkle, then the door was softly opened, old Marco appeared with a lantern in his hand, and in accustomed silence conducted me to the upper room, where I found her sitting at my last visit, in that sweet summer evening.

She sat there now, but the summer was gone from it and from her, and I started in amazement to see the whole apartment hung with deep black cloth, which covered walls and furniture, in the fashion of ancient mourning, and Madame herself in a robe of the same sombre hue, with-

out relief or ornament, her long hair falling loose on her shoulders, and her face so strangely altered that years of watching or of sorrow seemed to have passed over it since I saw it last.

It might have been the unusual dress, the surrounding black and the peculiar light which shone faintly and fitfully from a lamp in the form of those which burned in ancient sepulchres; but the effect was extraordinary. I should have known her under any circumstances, yet never could have believed that woman would alter so far.

“Welcome, my friend,” she said, kindly, but there was no smile; “you are surprised to see me and my house in mourning? they have been so for many a year upon this day; as I told you, it is an anniversary which must return; why cannot such days be blotted out and erased from the calendar? Perhaps, because all the days would go, in that case, for most people have got some of the kind. You look frightened, Lucien; does a mass of black and a faint light make me and my place so strange to you? No, I am aware it does not; you were only surprised, not prepared, perhaps; but sit down, you are the first that ever shared my mourning; that

early example of Job's friends might keep one from sharing the like, if it were not often enough repeated in the world."

I acknowledged my surprise, and tried to keep clear of seeming curious about the family events; she passed at once from the subject to that of mourning in general; what a knowledge she had of the various forms and ceremonies by which the tribes of men express their woe in different climes and ages! Her own robe was made after the fashion of the mourning mantle which the Spartan mothers put on when their sons returned from a lost battle, and Demosthenes assumed when the Athenians would not go to war with Philip of Macedon. So Madame told me, and I believed it, and all our talk was of sombre subjects.

Dinner was served in another room, as darkly draped, all the table furnishings were ebony, and the dishes were those of the strict Greek Lent, "as pious old-fashioned people keep it in Moscow and Kioff," said Madame, "as we Greeks of the Byzantine strain have been accustomed to keep it in days of mourning ever since the Eastern Church was founded."

She was not melancholy or out of spirits that evening, but grave and serious as the Forbes'

themselves could be ; but her wider range of thought, larger knowledge, and more free and fearless nature allowed no shadow of dullness to fall upon our converse. We talked gravely and familiarly, she told me a good deal about old Greek and Tartar customs as they meet and mingle in Eastern Russia, the ancient seat of her family ; about towers and castles there, unknown to my historical reading ; about convents, churches, and sepulchres where the Tartar prince and the Greek merchant seem to have equal rights and distinctions before and since the Muscovite was lord in that quarter, but never a word did she say regarding the anniversary or the cause of its heavy mourning.

The hours always flew quickly in her company. I had been watching for an opportunity to introduce the subject of Sally Joyce, but none being found, it almost slipped out of my memory in the multiplicity of our topics. I think the last was something about Ivan the Terrible and his conquest of Kazan—it was a theme she often happened on, when all at once Madame subsided into silent thought, which I did not venture to disturb till she lifted her eyes which had been resting on the black carpet, and said, “ Lucien, whether is it better to banish from one’s mind

and sight all traces of a great irrecoverable calamity, or to keep some solemn memorial and commemoration of it by way of tribute, paid for all the rest of one's days?"

"I cannot tell, Madame, but it seems to me that what Lady Macbeth said was wise, 'things without remedy should be without regard.'"

"Yes; but she could not act upon the wisdom—witness the sleep-walking and the washing of her hands. Shakespeare showed himself a great poet there; memory or conscience—they are the same thing, my friend, in spite of moralists and metaphysicians—will have its own: there is no real forgetting short of that blessed Lethe in which my ancestors believed; sacrifices must be offered to the dead of men and of days, or they will haunt us. Did you never find that our regarding the losses or misfortunes of your own life? Is it not needful to take them into consideration at times, to give them certain hours set apart to their service, and, as it were, worship from the better present, that so they may not intrude their memory into it, and take up too much space in the world within?"

"My experience is not sufficient to say correctly; it may be the case in matters like those of which Lady Macbeth spoke."

“It is,” said Madame, decidedly, like one speaking out of her own heart; “and, Lucien, that is why I keep this mourning day, which you have come to share with me, my first—my only friend!” How earnestly and kindly she looked at me; and I could do nothing but answer the look, saying by that glance, how happy—how honoured her words made me; how willing I was to serve and assist her, if possible; how resolute to keep her secret, no matter what was its nature, if she would but take me into her confidence; and then came the recollection of the warning I had to give her; now was the time to prove my value as a friend, the only opportunity the evening offered.

“If you think me such,”—I could scarcely get the words out—“you will not misunderstand my motive for telling you what I have been trying to speak of all this evening—it is scarcely worth talking of, either; but it is right that you should know it.” Her eye was upon me; it had turned to keen, cold scrutiny now; but I went on in the strength of my own honest purpose—“I met Sally Joyce by accident last Sunday night, when crossing Berkeley-square; she was returning with her brother and sister from some excursion; was highly excited, and,

I think, had got some spirits. I did not wish to speak to her, but she stopped me and talked—mere nonsense, of course—but in a foolish threatening manner, regarding you.”

“What did she say, Lucien? Tell me the very words. I ask you for friendship—for honour’s sake; for the league and compact you made with me.”

I would have told or done anything on the adjuration, and, though it was a hard and ungracious task, I told her, word for word, all that had passed between Sally and me. Her face never altered from the cold, calm composure it had assumed; but as I related the last about Christmas Eve, and what happened in Dublin, Madame’s eyes slowly closed, and she leant back in her chair with fixed features and clasped hands.

“Sally said true, Lucien, as madness and malice often do, and both are troubling her;” how coldly and quietly she spoke; but her eyes were still closed. “There is no danger of me forgetting the place and the time; it is the worst of my black destiny that such a creature should have guessed it. Lucien, my friend, the only man not a Palivez I ever had confidence or trust in, can you not help me to get this woman out of my way?”

“I’ll do anything that is possible for man to help you, Madame.” She had opened her eyes now, and there was something like tears in them, and all my sister’s warnings, all my own resolutions, made and broken so long ago regarding that woman, all the omens and suspicions that ever crossed me were scattered to the winds; she could have bound me to any service—any sin at that moment.

“I think you would, Lucien; but there is only one effectual way, and I can’t ask you to do it.”

“Tell me what it is, Madame; I don’t ask you what Sally knows. If you thought me worthy of the confidence, no doubt you would give it, but perhaps I am not, or you may think so; only tell me what is the way Sally can be managed—what you wish me to do, in short, and I will do it.”

“No, Lucien, I will not have your hands dyed for me—that is the one effectual way I spoke of; you start back, my friend; well, it is natural you should; if you knew all, you would not come here, I suppose.”

“I would, Madame, if you allowed me. No matter what there is to know, whatever the all may be, I hold it my heaviest mis-

fortune that you think so poorly of me as to keep your troubles—so heavy and dark, I know they must be—from me, whom, nevertheless, you have called your friend.”

“Ah, Lucien!”—she extended her hand, and I clasped it; but how deathly cold the fingers had grown!—“it is the misfortune of the self-contained, self-reliant life which I and all the Palivezi for many a generation have led, that it makes one a trustless stranger with all mankind. We have been accustomed to employ and pay them, to get their service, to preserve their respect, to maintain our superiority of power and place, by keeping our own counsel and covering our calamities; but we have learned to trust in no hand, no heart but our own; and so it happens that such minds never can regard others—however noble, however true—as worthy to be reckoned with themselves. The honour, the friendship, scarce as such things are, may come within our reach, and be passed by—seen, but not believed in; for long doubting makes faith impossible, and so they are as the weed in the desert, which sees not when good comes (that old book has powerful passages in it, Lucien); that is the case with

me. I have seen honour, loyalty, truth in your face—discretion, too—and we have had something like friendship; but I cannot yet trust you with everything, and yet you are the only living man I would trust so far. Believe me, help me if you can; but let me know you better, and I will tell you all.”

“Madame, I ask for no confidence a moment sooner than you choose to give it. If you never think proper to do so, I will be equally proud and happy to risk everything in your service.”

She said nothing, but clasped my hand; sat thoughtful for a minute or two looking down on the black carpet, and then lifted her eyes with—

“Lucien, my mind is made up to take no notice of the woman—Sally Joyce, I mean. She has no proof, no actual knowledge; any compliance with her demands would seem like a bribe, make her imagine herself worth purchasing, and therefore become more troublesome.”

“She is Esthers’ half-sister,” said I, “can he not manage her?”

“He says he cannot,” said Madame; “but

we must leave him out of the question. Should Sally attempt to make any further disclosures to you, have the goodness not to listen to them. I will take no measures either of repression or conciliation. Let her go on. She has got into her mother's habits, it seems; it will bring her to the terminus poor Esther reached; and the sooner the better, I must say, for all parties."

I knew she was speaking of a lunatic asylum, and I thought of the ragged man and his long knife. Had Madame a depôt of people put away in that fashion? Was it the destination of friends as well as servants? I was ashamed of the thought, and yet it crossed me while she changed the subject suddenly, as was her wont, by taking from the nearest table a magnificently illustrated manuscript of the ancient Greek Church liturgy—written, as she said, before daubs were considered the holiest things—and turned it over with many a curious and scholarly comment on the figures and devices it presented. They were clear and strong illustrations of that early Christian thought or fancy which found its evil agencies in the dethroned gods, and formed its infernal kingdom out of the classic Olympus.

“You see from whence the demons of the Middle Ages came,” said Madame. “They were a legacy left to the Goths by the schools of Antioch and Alexandria. Out of Gothic darkness they came still blacker into monkish lore, by which they were transmitted to modern theology. In the time of this manuscript—I think it belongs to the sixth century—the Byzantine empire had its ancient gods yet in classic trim, though transferred to Tartarus. Pluto and Pan, Venus and Apollo, are here each with their attributes and legends as accredited in the temples that were still standing at that period, though forsaken or turned to Christian uses. Here, too, are the Furies, who frightened all unlucky sinners from Orestes downwards; and here is their mistress, Hecate, the infernal Nemesis—the moon, in her malignant aspects, blasting the bodies and minds of men with pestilence or madness.”

As she spoke, I became aware of a slight smoke of a peculiar odour which seemed to come from below and fill the room, accompanied by a monotonous and most melancholy sound, like a low, continuous wail, which had, nevertheless, something of articulate speech.

“It is only old Marco and Zoe burning incense and chanting psalms; they always do so on this particular night, from eleven to twelve.”

I glanced up at the time-piece—it was the same she had in Broad-street—but the beautiful side of the figure was covered with black drapery, and the skeleton’s hand was pointing to some minutes after eleven. It was time to say good-night, and I rose, but she laid her hand on my arm—

“Stay with me, Lucien, till after midnight. I have spent this hour alone for many a year, but now that you are with me, do not go till after twelve.”

She spoke in a low, entreating tone, with downcast eyes and a hand that clung to mine. It was strange to see the head of the Palivez bank, the politic and proud lady of Old Broad-street and Mayfair, so subdued and weighed down by the influence of some fearful memory which her wealth and wisdom had no power to strive with.

But she clung to me in the hour of weakness and terror; and but half trusted as I was, my heart swelled with pride and hope. The terrible mystery brought us nearer in spite of fortune

—made my friendship and service necessary to the solitary woman, and gave them a value above those of any Russian prince or corresponding banker.

“I’ll stay till the morning—till any time you like, Madame.”

“No, no,” she said, “only till after twelve. It is a foolish thing to be so afraid of sitting alone through the hour which I have seen so often come and go; but I am getting weak. Perhaps the shadow of the coming fate falls upon me.” The last words were uttered in a sort of whisper, as if to herself; and still more drearily came the wailing chant from below, and thicker grew the odorous smoke. “It is the old exorcise rites of our Greek Church they are celebrating. Marco and Zoe are the last confidential servants of the Palivez: born in our house, and bound to us, not by vassalage, but by true allegiance, which descended through their generations, they served us from father to son. I am the last of my family, and they are the last that will serve me in this manner. If their humble faith were mine, would it be better in this hour? But one cannot alter one’s-self, and become a child, after having inquired and thought.”

She looked at the time-piece, rose, and retired to the farther corner of the room ; there she sat down in a low seat, leant her head upon her hands till the long hair fell over and hid her face from me. Whatever were her thoughts, she evidently wished to keep them to herself ; the thickening smoke and the wailing chant went on, and I sat silently waiting to be of some use—wishing to be of some, with a pity I had never felt for Madame Palivez before—till the time-piece struck twelve, when the chant suddenly ceased, the smoke gradually grew fainter, and Madame rose from the low seat, looking white as marble, but composed, and all herself again.

“ I will give you no thanks for sitting with me, Lucien,” she said, “ you are my friend ; if I had not thought so, you should not have borne me company in such an hour. It is passed ; and you will do me another service—I know you will, and, therefore, do not ask—it is only not to mention the fact to me or to any one else.”

“ Whatever passes between you and I, Madame, I hold myself bound in honour and in friendship to keep secret from all the world ; and in your presence I will speak only of what you please to hear.”

“I believe that, Lucien, for you have proved it; but, like many a pious lady, I have more faith in practice, if I could trust thoroughly. But good-night,” she said, hastily, as old Marco, followed by a woman not less erect, though much more wrinkled than himself, stepped into the room with an Eastern reverence and an earnest look at her mistress, as if to see that the watch was well over.

CHAPTER XIII.

LUCIEN'S VISITS TO MADAME PALIVEZ ARE WATCHED.

WHEN I left Madame Palivez some minutes after twelve on Christmas morning, my thoughts of her had undergone a remarkable change. I loved the woman, better it may be than I had ever done. I had a dark impression of mystery and sin hanging about her and her house, which I could not get rid of, which a thousand evidences confirmed; but I felt that whatever the secret might be, she was less guilty than unfortunate. Some great and heavy sorrow, some unexplained calamity had fallen upon her days; judging from the burned incense and the chanted psalms, there seemed something weird and unearthly in it, the old exorcive rites of the Greek Church were celebrated by her confidential servants at the midnight hour, though not believed in by their mistress; yet the sight of her, seated

so low in the corner, her head bowed and her long hair covering her face, recurred to my mind as the saddest picture of unexplained unuttered misery I had ever imagined.

Yes, she was unfortunate—unhappy beyond my guessing; and I was her friend, asked to watch with her through that hour of terrible commemoration, not trusted, indeed, with her secret, it was too hard for the proud heart to tell me yet.

Had she not clearly explained the nature and habits of minds like her own? I was her friend, nevertheless; the lady of the bank and the poor English clerk had grounds on which they could meet as equals, and I had the man's part to do of support, if not protection. There was joy in the thought, and yet all was wrong about her, and me for her sake. I knew it; though the mystery had not been explained, it was too black for good or well-doing ever to consort with it; and there was Sally Joyce, my sister's impressions, my aunt's dying words, and my own experience in the background.

I was walking rather slowly through the park with these thoughts. There had been rain, which cleared away the mist; the moon was shining, the wind was so low that it scarcely

moved the bare boughs, but a rustling among the underwood which skirted my path, a crisping of the dry leaves which still lay there in heaps, had made me pause and look round more than once, with the thought that somebody was keeping in the shade and dogging me; but I could see nothing, and concluded it was fancy, till about half way to the stream, at a spot where the path wound abruptly and the underwood grew thickest, a chance look showed me something white on which the moonlight glistened; at another glance I saw that there was a face looking out at me, though intended to be hidden; it was but a glimpse, for the whiteness moved away, but I knew it to be that of Hannah Clark.

My first feeling was one of positive terror; the thing was so inexplicable, so improbable, but it was no mistake; and my next impulse was to find out what the deaf and dumb girl could be doing there at such an hour. At one bound I darted into the heart of the thicket, calling her by name, till I recollected what a useless pursuit it was. I could see nobody, but my ear caught a sound of crisping leaves and breaking boughs, which could not be the wind. I followed it as quickly as I could, peering and

searching on all sides ; the park was wild and overgrown in that direction, I stumbled into holes, got caught by the brambles, lost the sound, which seemed to die away in the distance, and found that I was losing my way. To make matters worse, a cloud had come over the moon ; the night was not exactly pitch dark, but something very near it. I went astray two or three times before I fairly recovered my way home, without seeing sign or trace of Hannah or any living creature, and it was half-past one by our house clock when I reached No. 9. My sister did not sit up for me now, as I carried a latch-key.

All the house was silent. Hannah could not have come home before me, for how would she get admission ? but, to make sure of her absence, I stepped quietly up to the room where she was accustomed to sleep. The door was closed, but nobody locked their doors in No. 9 ; I softly lifted the latch and looked in with my candle. Hannah was there in bed and fast asleep, I thought at first, but a second glance convinced me that the dumb girl was making believe to be so, and very unpleasantly astonished I closed the door and retired, resolving to investigate the business with Rhoda as soon as possible.

Next morning Hannah was up and about her household work as if nothing particular had happened overnight; but she made great efforts to look simple and unconscious when my eye chanced to light upon her, and I took the opportunity of our sitting together at breakfast to inform Rhoda of my vision in the park.

“Goodness be about us, what could she be doing there? wasn’t it the wonderful place for her in the dead of the night!” and my sister crossed herself with more than usual piety.

“I don’t know what she was doing, Rhoda, but there she was, and must have got home before me; but I can’t imagine how she got out or in without your knowledge.”

“Lucien,” said my sister, after a minute or two of frightened thought, “you’ll be angry with me, maybe, for not telling you sooner; but I knew you never liked Hannah, on account of her noisy kind of talk, all the poor soul could do in the way of talking; isn’t she quit it entirely, and got mighty quiet of late?”

“But what had you to tell me about her, Rhoda?”

“Well, Lucien, it was just this; Hannah has been in the way of going out and coming in again in a manner I can’t understand. I have

missed her by day, and by night, too, out of the house and out of her bed ; there is nobody about this place has a latch-key but yourself—anyhow, I never would think of giving her one ; but she gets out, Lucien, and she gets in at all hours, and how she does it, or where she goes to, I can't make out."

" But why did you not watch her, Rhoda ? "

" I tried it, but could not get it done ; if it was night ; sleep would come on me ; if it was day, something would happen to take me upstairs, and there she would be in the kitchen when I came back ; goodness knows, Lucien, I don't know what to think of it, and sometimes putting all the queer things that has happened in our house together, and old Irish stories—superstitions, maybe, you'll call them—I take a notion that she might be going with the fairies, only I never heard that they come about London."

" No, Rhoda, I don't think they do, whatever worse things may come."

" In course you're laughing at me," said Rhoda ; " but such things did happen in Ireland ; there was Nelly Flinge, that never could be kept in the house, summer or winter, and came back with a new green swash on Hallow Eve. Mind, I don't say Hannah is going the

same way, it might be after worse, as you say; she is active and crafty, I never could come up to her in some things."

"Did you ask her about it?"

"I did, Lucien, many a time, and scolded her, too—the Lord forgive me for she is deaf and dumb—but I never could get her to own that she had been out at all, much less how she managed it; but, Lucien, it is out she goes, and not disappearing like Allie Connor—howsoever, you don't mind her, she died in Armagh before we left it—but as I was saying, it's out Hannah goes, for I have heard the door creak onaccountable like, and the next minute she was off."

"How long has the business been going on?"

"That's the thing I was thinking of the other day, Lucien. It is a good while since the very beginning. I missed her first one evening just after my aunt's last sickness came on; and you mind what Mrs. Muncy told us that day we came home from the Masons, about the gentleman that had been asking for you and signing to Hannah. She said it was Father Connolly; but Mrs. Muncy, when she saw the priest at the time of my aunt's funeral, told me it wasn't

him at all, Lucien. I don't know what to think of it."

"You should have told me sooner, Rhoda."

"So I should, but I could not believe the thing at first myself, it was so onaccountable, and come by slow degrees, you see; she is getting better or worse at it every day; it was not for love of keeping a secret from you, Lucien, but I knew you didn't like Hannah from the beginning. I was afraid to put you more against her, poor orphan as she is, and you had troubles enough of your own."

"Yes, Rhoda, but this business might bring more trouble to us both. Hannah's goings out in that hidden way can be for no good purpose; there is bad company enough to be found so near a great town—people far worse than your Irish fairies, and poor Hannah is not qualified for taking care of herself. I wish we had not brought her to our house, but it was the only thing we could do at the time, and I think we are bound to take care of her."

"In course we are, Lucien; and I was just thinking we are better off now, and I have got that income, couldn't I spare as much out of it as would pay for Hannah's keeping with some decent people in Ireland? I wouldn't give her

to nobody here. I could not trust one of them to do right by the poor soul, that can't speak for herself; no, not the Masons, Lucien; honest and respectable as they are, they have all the same hard faces and hard hearts. But there is people in Ireland—not our cousin, mind, we had enough of him and his upsetting wife—but Father Connolly would find somebody that would take her and keep her away from bad company and bad notions, for I doubt there is something of that kind dealing with her. She was company for me once and I would have missed her, but since she has turned so queer and crafty, I think both me and the house would be as well without her; this outgoing will come to no good, and whoever she meets, or wherever she goes to, Hannah is the changedest person since it begun.”

“How is she changed, Rhoda?”

“Well, just in everything, and there is no peace living with her. She won't mind a word I say, she won't tell a word of truth—in course it's signs I mean, but it is all the same—and when there is anything said or done against her mind, she gets up like a fury, Lucien; I don't think one would be safe long in the house with her, and if you let me, we will get her sent to Ireland.”

Some further conversation revealed particulars of Hannah's conduct which the kindly and forbearing nature of my sister, and that almost superstitious regard for the afflicted, which, in common with most of the Irish peasantry, she entertained, had made her keep from my knowledge.

The dumb girl had become not only unruly but violent, made more than one fierce attack on Rhoda, when she attempted to admonish her by reproving looks and signs. There was no mode of reasoning with Hannah that we knew of, whatever the teachers of her class may do, whatever Helen Forbes, with her earnest, patient piety, might have done.

I knew the untaught, unconvertible woman had strong muscles and strong passions. Active and crafty she must be beyond our calculations, and whatever took her to the heart of Kensington Park at midnight, whoever the signing gentleman might be whom she had passed off for Father Connolly, the hidden outgoings must lead to no good for us or herself.

Then there was my sister alone in the house with her all day while I was in Broad-street. What might an attempt to watch or control those outgoings stir up Hannah to do? She

had once threatened Rhoda with a knife; "she didn't mean nothing, it was just her way of showing temper, maybe, said the over-conscientious girl, when relating the circumstance; but it struck terror to my heart for possible consequences, and I at once adopted Rhoda's scheme of settling her with some decent people in Ireland.

We agreed that it would be well to consult Father Connolly; he would doubtless advise us in the matter, and also recommend some honest family who could take charge of Hannah; her wants could be provided for from my sister's income and my own, and though our house might be made more solitary, it would also be safer.

In the meantime, I advised Rhoda to keep a strict but very quiet watch on her movements, resolved to do the same myself, and turned over in my mind contrivances for attaching a bell to the outer door which would ring the instant it was opened, however softly, and thus give me information to follow Hannah to her place of rendezvous, for that there was a gentleman in the case I could not doubt, and my curiosity to discover who had come so cunningly and struck up an acquaintance knew no bounds.

Rhoda watched, and so did I when at home, the bell was actually fastened to the door with a wire passing up to my bedroom, but whether our precautions or the knowledge that she had been seen in the Park warned Hannah, certain it was that, as far as we could observe, there was no outgoing for the next week. About the middle of it she had, indeed, contrived to get an errand to the greengrocer's, who knew her well, and did business a little way off at the top of the village street; but Hannah had returned in good time with the greens she went for, it was broad daylight, and my sister had watched her to the turn.

The greengrocer's wife—who being from Ireland, and a discreet woman, Rhoda thought proper to take into confidence—said that to her knowledge Hannah never took up with nobody but the Jew's boy, as she called the son of an old clothesman or wardrobe-seller who kept shop hard by, and belonged to some of the tribes of Israel. The Jew's boy and Hannah were in the habit of exchanging signs and salutations; but it was not to meet the sharp, cunning-looking, unwashed urchin, under ten, that she stole forth at such uncommon hours.

CHAPTER XIV.

HANNAH CLERK GETS A NEW MISTRESS.

I MADE no discoveries and the week passed ; Father Connolly was so much occupied with his Christmas duties, that there was no opportunity for consultation, and the subject was fresh in my mind when I went to the Broad-street back rooms on Sunday evening. Madame Palivez was there in her accustomed looks and wonted spirits—her purple velvet dress, gold buttons and pins, but no trace of the black drapery or the mourning robe.

They had all been left at the solitary woodland villa, and the remembrance of their cause or causes seemed to be left there too. Madame was as lively in chat, as free and easy of thought as ever I found her ; we discussed the news of the day, new books, new plays, new pictures ; she had an early acquaintance with them all, an

unfailing supply of west-end and city gossip, and nobody could have imagined that night that she had been the very woman who had sat so fear or sorrow-stricken, with incense burned and psalms chanted about her on Christmas Eve.

I cannot recal how our conversation turned upon it, I had no intention of intruding my family difficulties on her, but I think it was an American print she had bought, of an Indian stealing after his unsuspecting enemy, hatchet in hand, through the thick of a forest, which reminded me partly, by something in the face of the savage, of the one I had seen peeping out at me from the underwood in Kensington Park.

“Is it not lifelike?” said Madame, catching my look of recollection, never had woman more perceptive power, “and like something you have seen, Lucien? Tell me, now, honestly, if men ever do so, of what does that print remind you? Have you,” and I knew her question was not merely curious, “ever seen anybody stealing along, watching or hiding in the shade of trees or shrubbery in the manner of the Indian there—in short, Lucien, did you ever see anything of the kind in the neighbourhood of my villa?” It was right and necessary to give her the whole

detail regarding Hannah, as far as my sister and myself knew it, and I did so at once.

“Curious and strange,” said Madame evidently much relieved; my tale was not what she had dreaded and expected to hear. “Those lives which are so cut off from ours, by having the two great channels of human communication closed, are not to be marked out or measured by our schooled and conventional reason. They remain in the primitive state of mankind, before schools were set up, creeds invented, or laws made to bind and loose, and they keep the wild liberty, perhaps the occult powers of that far-off time. But what you suspect is very probable. Hannah may have got into company or connexions by which little credit and less comfort may come to you and your house. The sooner she is removed the better; but, Lucien, why trouble yourself finding a home for her in Ireland? I will take the girl; my Eastern education and leanings have given me a fancy for mutes, and there is a woman wanted just now to act as my chamber-maid.”

“I am afraid Hannah’s training will scarcely qualify her for acting as your chamber-maid, Madame, and I have told you what sort of a temper she has.”

“ Oh, never mind, Madame Oniga will manage all that. Six months under her discreet tuition will bring your protégée to a wonderful degree of civilization; as I said before, I have a fancy for mutes, they suit my service. In short, Lucien, let the girl come to me, tell your sister about it, and if she is satisfied I will send Calixi to conduct Hannah into the charge and domains of Madame Oniga.”

“ My sister will be grateful to you, as you may believe I am, for offering to take such a responsibility off our hands; you probably know why we incurred it?”

“ I do, Lucien; it was handsomely done, and therefore I wish to relieve you of it.”

“ But, Madame, is it wise? is it safe for you? may not the same discredit and discomfort come to your house which you have justly remarked to threaten ours?”

“ Lucien, my house is a different one, and differently regulated. Trust me, the silent immoveable Russian system practised by my discreet housekeeper, because she neither knows nor would ever learn any other, is the very thing for your unmanageable mute; it knows no change, no modification, no individual will or choice; people do as they are bidden and

see nothing else done ; the work, the meals, the prayers, for Madame carries them on also, go like clock-work, without variation or regard to anything above or below. There your protégée will be brought into discipline ; you need not be afraid of her being overworked or too severely dealt with—such things are not permitted in my territories, but the new and unfamiliar life to which she will find herself transplanted, the strange faces around her, the regular on-going of matters, steady and silent as the on-goings of night and day—I'll vouch for their being so under Madame Oniga—will take hold on her mind. She will learn to be steady and subject, and being removed from the company or connexions she has got into, she must needs give it up and probably forget it. Have you any idea that there is really company or connexions concerned ?”

“From what I mentioned of the man who called at our house and never came back, I conclude there is, and I thought you had taken the same view, Madame.”

“Well, I did ; but just now it struck me might not the girl have been acting as a spy on you ? Are you quite sure that her stealing out and concealing herself in the old park

at midnight was not prompted by jealousy ; might not her silent fancy have followed you, and might not her outgoings be on purpose to trace your steps and discover a supposed as well as successful rival ? It occurs to me that I have seen her lurking about my villa in the same stealthy manner, about the end of last summer, when you were coming and going—I think, I hope it was she.”

“ If it were, Madame, I honestly believe you have misinterpreted her motives. Whatever fancies Hannah Clark may have, they never went my way.” I spoke from sincere conviction ; the dumb girl had regarded me with as little preference as I did her ; she knew me as the gentleman of the family who didn't like her noise, for whom floors had to be swept and rooms put in order ; her goings forth had been mostly when I was out, it was true, but then I had reason to believe they did not lead her in the direction of Broad-street, where I was mostly to be found. In short, it was my firm belief that neither fancy nor jealousy, as concerned myself brought Hannah out at such unaccountable hours, and supplied her with a key for our street-door, which, unless my sister's hypothesis of the fairies were accepted, she must have possessed.

There was company or connexion of some sort, and none of the best. I demonstrated that to Madame Palivez, and she dismissed her conjecture with "Well, Lucien, you cannot claim, the conquest, I see, and am pretty sure you never tempted it, as the glory would not be great. However, I hold by my first proposal—Hannah Clark shall be received into my establishment, if your sister be agreeable; tell her I pledge my word and honour that the dumb girl shall be well and kindly treated, and never want for provision, I take that matter on myself."

"It is very kind—very generous of you, Madame."

"Nonsense, Lucien; I told you I had a fancy for mutes, and I know it is the best thing for her and for you."

The question was thus settled between us. I lost no time in telling my sister next day, and Rhoda's surprise was great. I don't think she entirely relished the idea of Hannah going to Madame Palivez; but the expediency of her removal had got deeply impressed on my sister's mind; her unaccountable outgoings and incomings had inspired Rhoda with a sort of superstitious dread, and she was willing to see Hannah settled in any good quarters out of No. 9.

“It’s uncommon kind of the lady to take her, Lucien ; all on your own account, no doubt. I always thought she would do something for you, and I oughn’t to have such notions in my mind against her ; but I would rather Hannah was going to Ireland to live among the Connors or the Burkes, though the place wouldn’t be near so grand. But since the lady promises so well for Hannah, and you are sure she will keep it, let her go in the name of goodness, and just say to the lady for me, that I’ll never forget her kindness, though I can’t do no more than mind her in my prayers.”

I assured Rhoda, what I really believed, that Madame Palivez would keep her promise strictly and honourably, that Hannah would be safe and well provided for in her establishment, and we should be relieved from all anxiety on her account. On one subject we were both doubtful, and it troubled us—would Hannah be willing to go to the strange house, and strange people? We had voluntarily taken charge of the dumb girl, and how could we send her from us without her own consent?

“If she don’t like to go we will not ax her, Lucien ; maybe the hand of Providence is in it ; mind, I am not saying anything against the

lady, but I am bothered for fear Hannah should want to stay with us. I never thought of parting with her once, but this is a changing world ; however, I'll just go down and see what Hannah has got to say about going to the lady, it will settle your mind before you go to the bank."

Rhoda went to put the question ; I had never acquired the art of conversing with Hannah, notwithstanding the friendly and frequent exhortations of Helen Forbes. Men possessed of the same senses live most in some of them, and my habit of life was more in the ear than the eye. So the gulf between the dumb girl and me was even wider than it might have been ; but I knew Rhoda could speak to her mind, and I knew she had endeavoured in vain to get the slightest admission regarding her secret outgoings or her mode of opening our street-door. Would she be equally unsuccessful now in getting Hannah's consent to her own transfer to the unknown establishment of Madame Palivez ? The consultation was brief and much quieter than usual, but Rhoda came up looking very much astonished.

" She is willing to go, Lucien, quite willing ; and it takes the weight of a mountain off my mind ; but nobody could have expected it. Sure

I was always kind to her, and so were you in a manner," and Rhoda sat down as if overcome with amazement; "but, Lucien, she is perfectly happy, ready to dance for joy at the chance of getting away. I suppose it's on account of the grand place she is going to; many a time I have seen her looking at that lady when she rode by. I never thought Hannah had a liking for her; but she is glad to go and leave us, anyhow."

I was surprised, too, and not very pleasantly; nobody likes to be parted from without regret, especially by their dependants, but the next moment I thought and said to my sister, "We are glad to get quit of her, and as things have turned out, it is best that Hannah should be so ready for the change. I cannot understand it, but neither can I comprehend the rest of her doings; you will be well without her, Rhoda, and she will be safe with Madame Palivez's housekeeper."

"Oh, it's just the hand of Providence," said Rhoda, shaking off her astonishment; "but run, Lucien, or you'll be late for the bank, and don't be afraid that I won't get her ready."

Some three days after that family council, when the getting ready was near its conclu-

sion, and Hannah's eagerness for her departure seemed on the increase every hour, Madame Oniga met me in the passage to Esthers' office, which was rather out of her beat, and said in her discreet tone, "Madame has desired me to ask if the young person may be sent for to-day."

"As soon as Madame pleases," said I. The housekeeper passed on, and I caught a glimpse of Esthers peeping at our interview through the door, which happened to be ajar, and something in it must have gratified the manager, for he was smiling when I stepped in, but got immersed in business the next moment, and, to my great surprise, made no attempt to investigate the matter.

When I reached home that evening, Rhoda was sitting by the fire with a rather disconsolate look. Hannah was gone. "The bank lady's servant—an uncommon sensible foreign man—came in a coach and took her and her box away with mighty civility, but very little talk," said my observant sister; "and I hope Hannah will be happy and well, for she nearly jumped out of her skin with gladness to go, and hardly said as much as God bless you! to me. She is ongrateful, Lucien, but it's wrong to think

so of the poor soul. I am not just sorry. It is the best thing for us and for her, as you said ; but it's queer to look back and think that they are all gone. Hannah was the last of them ; and you and me will have the house to ourselves now. Howsoever, Father Connolly has been here. I wouldn't let Hannah go without him seeing her. He says it's an uncommon kind thing of the lady ; and the Greek Church she belongs to comes next to the Roman, only they don't make the sign of the cross right ; but that will do Hannah no harm, and he has promised to get a decent Irish girl to do the housework and keep me from being lonely. Goodness, goodness, but this is the changing world."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FORBES' TROUBLES.

Two or three times in the succeeding weeks, Madame Oniga waylaid me in the passages, as I guessed, by special commands, with the best accounts of Hannah. She was learning her new duties, giving general satisfaction, and seemingly well satisfied herself. Her line of service was in the private establishment, not in the bank-rooms, where Madame and the gravest of her satellites officiated for the clerks of conflicting creeds and cookery; but as time progressed, and she advanced in civilization, Hannah was allowed to appear occasionally in my Sunday visits, doing duty under the conduct of Calixi and other trusty Eastern men, chiefly, as Madame Palivez remarked, that I might see how well the transplantation agreed with her. It did agree beyond a doubt.

Hannah looked well and contented, but showed no joy at the sight of me, made no signs of inquiry after Rhoda, and I fancied was rather glad to get out of the room. Madame Palivez assured me that her troublesome tricks of outgoing and the like had been completely broken off by her removal. Hannah had made no attempt of the kind, since her coming to Old Broad-street. The silent, immovable system of Russian rule seemed best suited to her speechless life, and I observed that though not quite so lively as when with us, she looked more intelligent, thoughtful, and even refined.

Our minds were relieved concerning Hannah, and Father Connolly found us a maid—one of the many sober, well-doing Irish, an emigrant from his native parish, in the west of Ulster. I am not sure that she was not distantly related to the good priest also, for her name was Nelly Connolly. In process of time we found her to be an honest, faithful creature—a great help to Rhoda in her solitary housekeeping, and something of a companion too, as my sister required, as an only and trusty servant ought to be.

It quieted my conscience and cheered my heart in my long days at the bank, in my Saturdays' and Sundays' outgoings, to know in what

a cordial and social manner mistress and maid got on. They managed the household affairs; they went to chapel together; they kept fast and confession days; they told each other Irish tales and legends, and they especially agreed in finding fault with all the doers and dwellers of the land in which it was their lot to sojourn. Watt Wilson, the Masons, and all Rhoda's circle got sifted and criticised as they had never been before by their united wisdom; but no disturbance of the small society took place, the sifting and criticism being discreetly kept out of hearing. Without and within there were peace and plenty among us. We found our income easy and our house large. Mr. Forbes refused all increase of rent for it.

I made an effort to shake off some of my obligations that way; "but no, Lucien," he said, "I am satisfied with the terms and the tenants. While you and your sister are willing to stay, we will make no change of either;" and Helen hoped that I did not regard her papa as a landlord, but as a friend. Friendly he had been to me and mine beyond the possibility of return—friendly he and his daughter were still. Helen had taken no offence at Rhoda's declining her invitation to Notting Hill House. She had

heard me state her apologies without a remark, and never reverted to the subject, but she continued to drop in in the forenoons when I was at the bank, to bring small presents, to talk familiarly with Rhoda, and to make kind inquiries after Hannah Clark. We had been obliged to tell the Forbes' our reasons for parting with her, and Madame Palivez's kindness in taking her into the establishment in Broad-street.

The banker said it was the very best place that could be found for Hannah. Wherever Madame Palivez ruled, there would be good management and strict discipline, he was sure, but Helen lamented that there was little chance of her getting religious instruction. From what Mr. Esthers had told them, she was afraid the Greek lady had little relish for serious subjects, and her servants practised nothing but Russian and Greek superstitions.

Mr. Esthers told her a great deal about the bank in Broad-street and its ruler. His intimacy at Notting Hill House was thickening every day. I could not avoid seeing, for he took care I should, the notes and messages which passed between him and the banker—not to speak of the banker's daughter; small

epistles in her handwriting were left, as if by accident, on his desk; trusty boys, of whom Mr. Esthers had an out-door retinue—every one Jews—were continually coming and going with despatches, which they had evidently instructions not to keep too private. Through that arrangement, I was able to perceive that the subject-matter was not always of much importance.

It was Mr. Esthers' policy to exhibit the familiar footing on which he stood with the Forbes', to keep himself before their eyes and minds, if it were only by making a fuss. All this I could have understood; but in my Saturday visits—by the accounts which Rhoda gave me of Helen's conversation—by my sister's own remarks, always shrewd and far-sighted—by a thousand signs not to be rehearsed or remembered now, I discovered that the Jew manager, who gave them such good hopes of his conversion, and borrowed the proof catechism, had contrived to acquire a kind of influence over my prudent Scotch friends for which I could not account.

As I have said, his intimacy with them and their house seemed daily on the increase. He was not only received on Sundays to read ser-

mons and take part in their family devotions, but on week-days and evenings Mr. Esthers now found time for frequent though generally flying calls, and by the unconcealed notes and messages, I found out that he gave information and advice both in household and bank affairs. The Forbes' received him as a friend, responded to all his communications, complied with, almost anticipated, his wishes ; yet it became evident to me by this time that they did not like the Jew, nor really desire his company.

I had never been present at one of his calls. Both they and he seemed to consider my absence advisable ; that he had made and continued to make himself useful in matters of business, I could not doubt, but it was also manifest that he had obtained a kind of mastery over the Forbes', which they fretted under but could not shake off. I thought the health and spirits of both father and daughter seemed to be growing worse as the friendship thickened, and once or twice something like fear had appeared in Helen's look when she spoke of Mr. Esthers. Madame Palivez had warned me, and I had warned them in vain about the Christmas time. Now, the spring was drawing on, and the warning was confirmed in a manner I had never anticipated.

The discovery at first was but a vague impression, as most discoveries are. But one Saturday evening I was a little late in my arrival at Notting Hill House. The days were so far lengthened that windows were still open, and the lamps unlighted, when the footman told me in his quiet way that Mr. and Miss Forbes were in the library waiting for me, and unannounced, as usual, I went to join them. If I stepped lightly it was not intended to surprise or eavesdrop; but in the old silent house and deepening twilight I got into the library before they were aware.

Mr. Forbes was sitting at the table with his head bowed on his hand. Helen was close beside him, with her thin arm twined about his neck, as if to soothe and comfort him. I could not see his face, but there was an appearance of strange misery about the man, and unlike as they were, his attitude and manner at once brought to my remembrance Madame Palivez sitting on the low seat in her black-draped room, with the chant and the incense coming up. The recollections made me pause at the door.

I knew they were not conscious of my presence, and I heard Helen say—"Dear papa, what grieves and troubles you so? I wish Mr.

Esthers could keep his news to himself. I wish he had never come here at all. You have never been yourself since he began to look so much after our affairs."

"Nonsense, Helen, Mr. Esthers is very friendly," said the banker, raising himself and trying to speak composedly; but there was a queer tremor in his voice.

"Yes, papa; but he should not be talking and writing so much about Dublin to you, when he sees it troubles you," said Helen.

"It does not trouble me, girl; what put that in your head?" Forbes spoke fiercely, and I saw Helen shrink back.

"Nothing, oh nothing, papa, but I thought it grieved you on account of poor mamma and my little brothers."

"Yes, to be sure, it is natural," said Forbes slowly.

"Natural for you to grieve, papa; and yet, as Rutherford says, you know they are safe in our Father's house above," she said drawing close again.

"They are, they are, my good, my gentle daughter! and you will go to meet them there," said Forbes, throwing his arm round her.

"So will you, papa." The banker uttered a

long deep moan, which made me start, as he said, "Oh, Helen, Helen, I am a sinful man!"

My involuntary movement made them both turn. In shame and fear of being caught listening, I pressed forward, and was received with some confusion, though fortunately believed to have just entered. When the first greeting was over, Forbes took the opportunity of slipping out to recover himself, and Helen said to me, in a low confidential tone, "Papa has been greatly troubled to-day by—by some talk he had with Mr. Esthers about our old house in Dublin; talking of that place always brings his great loss to mind, and I don't think Mr. Esthers should do it; but it was some news he heard about repairs and alterations; they are going to make livery stables of our old house; it was in the liberties, in the old decaying part of Dublin, that was why papa left it, and none but poor people have lived there since; but Madame Palivez's bank stood just behind ours, at the end of Greek-alley; her private door opened into the alley, though the front was in Castle-street; I remember the place so well, though it is all changed now; that is why Mr. Esthers takes such an interest in it, yet I think he should not speak of it to grieve papa."

“He certainly should not ; but does Esthers know how his talk affects Mr. Forbes?”

“I think he must ; papa can't help showing it at times, and I have as good as told him. To be sure, Mr. Esthers might not have understood me, he is rather blunt, I think ;”—Helen looked at me for confirmation, which I could not give her on that point—“and it would seem strange, almost unintelligible to any person not thoroughly acquainted with him, that my father, sensible and serious as you know he is, Mr. La Touche, should be so troubled at the mere mention of a house which he occupied fourteen years.

“I remember when it seemed unaccountable to myself ; but we have all our peculiarities and our weaknesses ; my father has as few as any man, and would give way to nothing sinful, but that one he cannot get over ; indeed, it grows upon him, long as we have removed, and there may be a kind of reason for it, which I would not mention to any one but yourself.

“You see, our house in Dublin was a great old mansion, built when the Irish nobility lived in that part of the town. They call the place Old Kildare-street ; it stands on low ground at the back of Castle-street, and is part of the liberties ; but nobles

and gentry lived there as late as the volunteering time, and our house was the last occupied by people of rank and title; two maiden sisters, the last of the Galway family; one of their ancestors had built it for a town-house, before the rebellion of 1641, in the fashion which some say Moorish settlers brought to the old town of Galway from the opposite coast of Spain. I don't know if you have ever seen such houses, but they are still to be seen in old Spanish towns, with an open court in the centre, into which all the windows look, all the passages lead, and most of the doors open. Ours was not exactly on that model, it had front windows looking into the street, only they were old-fashioned and narrow; within, it was like other houses, but decorated in an antiquated manner, with ceilings of carved wood, walls which had been hung with tapestry, there were fragments of it remaining in papa's time, and small looking-glasses let into them about the fire-places and between the windows.

“But not quite in the middle, rather at the back, there was a small open court; whether it had been made to light the rooms there

—for some of them looked into it—or to follow the Moorish fashion so far, nobody could tell.

“The house was only two stories, rather one story and an attic, at that part, while the front was four; the high houses of Castle-street completely overshadowed it, and there was a back passage leading from the court into Greek-alley, close by the Palivez private door.

“We did not occupy the whole of the house, it was a great deal too large for us; papa would never let any part of it, though he was not so rich then as he is now; perhaps it would not have been wise on account of his business; he kept the bank, and we lived almost entirely in the front part; nobody liked the back court, it was so gloomy and out of the way; but papa kept a private office there to make up his accounts in. I believe that he found them more difficult then than he does now. It was a low room on the ground-floor, communicating with no other, for its door and window opened into the court, and close by was the door of the passage leading to Greek-alley, which papa always kept locked,

but found very convenient for going in and out, and seeing people on private affairs.”

“I don’t pretend to understand business, and papa has never told me particularly, but I have heard him say that he had a hard pull for it when he and my mother set up in Dublin; his Edinburgh family had not done as well as they might have done by him; they were not pleased at his match, because my mother had no fortune, though she was his equal, being a Fordyce of Aberdeenshire; he was determined to make his way in the world, and, you see, he has made it;”—how proud of that fact the spiritually-minded lady looked—“but, as I was saying, he had some difficulty at first, that made him take the large old house, because he got it at a nominal rent, and it was convenient to the Palivez, with whom he had frequent transactions. I know papa respects them still for the honourable, considerate way they behaved to him then, and I suppose his office in the back court was chosen on their account; but, you know, the Irish are superstitious—I beg your pardon, Mr. La Touche, I forgot you were from Ireland.”

“Never mind, Miss Forbes; it happens to be true; they are superstitious, and had a story, I suppose, about the Palivez?”

Miss Forbes did not know how that question interested me.

“Partly about them, and partly about our old house,” she said. “In the time of the two maiden ladies of the Galway family, Alexis Palivez, Madame’s uncle, I think, had owned the bank; they and he were acquainted, their fortunes were deposited in his bank, and the tale-tellers were not agreed whether the cause of quarrel between him and them was some unfair play regarding the money, or that he had trifled with the affections of both sisters, but the whisper went that Alexis Palivez had died suddenly after a supper with them, that the maiden ladies never were themselves after, that first one and then the other became eccentric, or rather insane, and lived and died under the management of keepers employed by their noble relatives in the rooms of the back court.

“It was also believed by the lower classes of Dublin, that spectral appearances had been seen in that part of the house, several

tenants were said to have been frightened out of it ; I suppose the people left on account of the decay and downcoming of Old Kildare-street ; but the low rent tempted papa to take it, and I wish he had never done so.

“ Don't suppose I am foolish enough to believe in Dublin tales, but, Mr. La Touche, there is a weak point in all our minds—none of us know what power imagination may get over us, nor what truths there may be in those old world traditions.

“ Remember that even the disciples thought they saw a spirit, and I don't say that my father actually saw anything supernatural, he has never told me so—indeed, he has a remarkable aversion to talking on the subject, which I own frightens me more than any tale could do ; but I know that some time in the winter, before my mother died, something made him withdraw from his office in the back court so quietly that we never knew when it was done—but his papers were removed, the room was locked up, and he never went to that part of the house after, if he could help it.

“ Then, you see, poor mamma took her

last illness and died; she had been always delicate, and that winter was too damp and cold for her, the doctor said so; and six weeks after her funeral my two little brothers were cut off by scarlet fever at the school in Edinburgh, so quickly that we never saw them alive.

“Oh! Mr. La Touche, it was a heavy trial; papa has never been himself since, and I think it is all bound up in his memory with that unlucky old house, and whatever made him leave his private office; but you won't mention what I have been saying to Esthers or anybody?”

I had scarcely assured Miss Forbes that I never repeated anything spoken in confidence, when the footman came to say dinner was ready, and the master was waiting for us in the dining-room.

She took my arm as familiarly as if I had been her brother—that disclosure about her father and his Dublin house had brought us nearer. The respect and esteem which everyone who knew Helen Forbes must have entertained for her, was increased on my part by the half hour's converse; but those were not my uppermost feelings. Alexis Palivez, Madame's oft-mentioned uncle,

had come in a weird fashion into the Forbes' history ; he was long gone at the time the banker abandoned his private office opening into the back court, and close by the passage leading to Greek-alley beside the Palivez private door.

Mr. Forbes had once intimated that Madame might have her own troubles ; was it art and part in them that weighed down his Scottish heart in the midst of wealth and prosperity, that made him shrink from the mention of the old house, and made Esthers ready to talk of it ? Had the private office been closed after Christmas Eve, and could Sally Joyce have told me the why and wherefore that night in Berkeley-square ?

We found Mr. Forbes composed and quiet, as usual. He half smiled on Helen and me, as if pleased to see us coming in arm-and-arm, apologised to me for his abrupt withdrawal, saying,

“He had been slightly indisposed, but was better now, and made no ceremony where I was concerned.”

Of course I made a very slight comment. Deep or doubtful transactions should be lightly passed over in society. The dinner passed as other dinners had done at Notting Hill House. We were all sensible and serious ; the latter, in par-

ticular, had deepened with the Forbes' of late. Esthers was spoken of by both father and daughter. It was still as a friend—still as one of whom they had great hopes in the conversion line; but any observer would have noticed an under-current of dislike which the good people themselves might not have been aware of—a strong inclination to take him to pieces, and a bright look-out for some apology or cause of wrath against him.

Those changes of feeling towards my manager were less evident to me then than they became on after reflection. But the more I pondered on that evening's disclosures, the more was I certain that no tangible reason for breaking off Esthers' acquaintance would ever be found by the Forbes'. He had got into the house, and would take care not to get out of it.

Yet, was it in pursuit of an heiress, or to spell out his employer's secret he had wormed himself into their society?

There was an evidence of the consolation Madame had given herself, when I told her of my interview in Berkeley-square.

Sally Joyce could prove nothing, or her brother would have no occasion to take such pains and trouble for the express purpose of ferretting out

the mystery, which, I had no doubt, he meant to turn somehow to his own advantage.

Under how many lives and houses did the roots of that Upas tree extend? I had never dreamt of a hidden link between the Forbes' and Madame Palivez, much more as they took of each other, and often as I had observed it; but now it was plain to me that such a connexion—one of memory and of fear—did exist. Helen had told me all she knew, but not all that was to be known; perhaps not all she imagined or suspected.

Far as Forbes confided in his daughter, and well as she deserved his confidence, there was a dark spot in his life and memory kept from her knowledge.

And what could that dark spot be? The man was honest, pious, and benevolent; the least likely to be tempted into vice or crime. But he had a hard pull when first setting up in Dublin.

He owed something to the honourable and considerate conduct of the Palivez. Was there any bond between them and him like that which my sister's honest instincts had suggested and warned me against? What I would have given to know the whole history of that private office in the

back court, and its convenient communication with Greek-alley! Esthers would make it out. Bound by none of my scruples, and doubtless less in the dark, he had hit on the surest track for discovering.

Once his footing was made sure in Forbes' house; the privacy and retirement in which he and his daughter lived; the absence of those worldly vanities and amusements which they eschewed, but which served to occupy other people's time, and furnish them with subjects of conversation; the frequent opportunities for observation and extraction which Esthers must have in their serious and solitary evenings between the the sermon-reading and the religious exercises—all could be turned to account, and he was the man to do it.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESTHERS ON THE CARPET.

I WENT home, pondering the whole subject, but could come to no further conclusion than the certainty of the Jew's success and the consequent peril of Madame Palivez.

Let me acknowledge that, with all their friendship to me and my family, the Forbes' had never interested me so deeply as now, when they seemed to have part and lot with her; their sombre piety, their subdued spirits, which I had sometimes found so dull and oppressive, took a different and almost romantic aspect from the thought that they had grown up in the shadow of her life's secret.

If it were so, how differently the same influence told on their strongly contrasted characters! They were never out of the cloud. No man could tell whence it rose or why it had fallen;

but it rested on the Forbes' perpetually. I had noticed the effect long before I began to guess at the cause.

But the stately lady—always so easy, graceful, and queen-like, even in the midst of business, with the ready smile and the fair open face, on which time had made no furrow, and sorrow left no shade, ruling her bank and receiving her most considerable clients in the Eastern magnificence of those luxurious back rooms; receiving fashionable company in Curzon-street, going forth to balls, parties, and plays; envied for her wealth, her gaiety, and above all, for her beauty—I had no doubt of that, and never suspected of the black-draped rooms, the deep mourning robe, the incense burned, and the psalms chanted at midnight. People who have got such burdens generally retire, I suppose from an instinctive dread of some end of the clue coming out, and being caught at.

But how much safer is the gay and public life when it happens to have bendings beyond the common! Esthers was profiting by the Forbes' mistake in that respect; perhaps not a mistake either, but a necessity with them. Scottish born, prudent, and strong-hearted as they were, the regal pride and high, buoyant

spirit of the bank lady was not given to the inhabitants of Notting Hill House.

But would not the Jew's possible discoveries compromise her? Should I not give her warning? But of what? there was more difficulty here than in Sally Joyce's demonstration. Yet that incident had made us better friends, at least more intimate, and I would take the first opportunity to let her know that Esthers was endeavouring to fish out something about the Forbes', that there was something to be fished out, and that they would not be sorry to lose his acquaintance.

Where there is a will there's way, and I found one on the following Sunday evening. It was never difficult to bring Esthers on the carpet. Madame was always attentive to any observation on him, and from the sound of the evening's church-bells, which reached us in her back rooms, I took occasion to remark—first, on the church-going habits of London; then on the devout manner in which my Scottish friends passed their Sunday evenings; thirdly, on their admission of Esthers; and lastly, on his fishing, and their consequent willingness to give him up. Madame listened to me and smiled. The statement, though made as plainly as possible,

had no terrors for her. She spoke seriously, but without fear or personal interest.

“I have always thought there was some uncommonly dark closet in that house. Remember, I have the best opinion of your friends, Lucien; but their seriousness and retirement have something penitential in them. They have been unlucky; that is the true term for their difficulty, whatever shape it might take at British tea-tables—aye, and in law-courts. Why do you start? I am not bringing accusations against the people. If I knew all that Esthers has to find out, do you suppose I am the person to publish it—to mention it at all, except between ourselves?”

I had supposed nothing of the kind; but all my conclusions, all the fabric of guess-work and suspicion I had built on what she called the Forbes' difficulty, was overthrown. I could not help looking her keenly in the face to see if there was any recollection of the back court and the private office there, but she returned my look with such a frank and kindly one: “Now, Lucien, you are fishing in your turn. You think I had some interest in sending Esthers to worm out Mr. Forbes' affairs. You think it is something connected with his business, and perhaps

with mine, that troubles the man and his daughter. I tell you it is not. You must have observed, for I did, that the skeleton has been in their house for many a year before you got acquainted with them. I grant they look more occupied with it of late, but that may be Esthers' raking up the old bones to serve his own purposes.

"Yes, trust me, he goes there for nothing else. I guessed it would come to that, and warned you for their sakes. You warned them, I know, for you are an honest fellow, and have nothing in common with our manager; but these pious, penitential people are the proper subjects for pryers, and always sure to betray themselves."

"I can't make it out why Esthers should take it into his head to talk so much of their old house in Dublin, and why that should annoy Mr. Forbes," said I, making a desperate plunge into my own puzzle.

"Their old house! It was in Kildare-street, almost behind ours—a large rambling place, rather out of repair, and said to be haunted, because two poor ladies, the last descendants of the Earls of Galway, lost their senses there,

partly because they never had much hold of them, and partly on account of securities they had given to our bank in behalf of an ill-doing nephew who fell in a duel at Cork. I remember it. Forbes had the house cheap; nobody else could be got to live in it. The Scotchman was beginning business and determined to get on. He was poor enough then, he is rich enough now, and wealth must be paid for. It commands and gets the heaviest price from us all. Yes, Lucien, if it ever comes your way, as I believe it will, remember that. Our old mythology holds good in spite of the creeds and forms that have supplanted it among the nations. Plutus and the infernal gods still dispense the gifts of fortune, but they can be propitiated only with blood."

The last words were uttered slowly, and in a sort of whisper, which made her voice sound somewhat like the sighing of the wind, which came through the open conservatory that soft spring evening. We sat silent for some minutes, and the church bells rang on.

When Madame spoke again, it was to change the subject. I had nothing more to say on it. My surmises were all at fault. If her secret and the Forbes' had any connexion, she was

determined I should not find it out, and must have had some assurance that Esthers would not, for it was manifest that she did not fear him in that quarter. The fact relieved my mind; it was for her and not for the Forbes' that I had been alarmed.

They were my friends. I would have done anything to serve them, to return or acknowledge their kindness; but if there were a skeleton in their house, as Madame remarked, it did not interest me except in the way of curiosity. Perhaps I had magnified matters, too, in my fancy, so full of Madame Palivez; perhaps Helen's account was the whole of the business. Retired, eccentric people, like her and her father, were apt to dwell a good deal on and make much of trifles. They had taken to Esthers in spite of my warnings; they were beginning to find him troublesome; the manager would be so wherever he got the opportunity; but Madame was safe, and I would wait on. She would tell me her secret some day.

CHAPTER XVII.

MELROSE MORTON TURNS UP IN LONDON.

EASTER had passed, the London season was opening, Madame was going to her house in Curzon-street. That made no difference to me. I was not one of her fashionable friends. But the villa where I had watched with her in that black midnight hour would be open too, with its myrtles and roses. She would be there as she had been in the bygone summer, and I would go there on Sundays, more than ever her friend.

I was thinking of that going home from the bank one very wet evening. Esthers had kept me late over some American accounts. I had missed the coach; got wet to the skin while looking for it, and then walked all the way. There were few lamps on the Bayswater-road, and at the darkest part, close by my own street,

I almost ran against a man who stopped me, with an anxious inquiry for his way to Bloomsbury. I did not see his face distinctly, but the voice brought me to a stand-still.

“Bloomsbury!” said I, “you are miles out of the way.”

“Indeed, sir. Will you have the goodness to tell me how I can get back? My lodgings are there, and I am a stranger in London.”

Before he had finished, I knew the voice, and I knew the man, for it was my early friend, Melrose Morton.

“Do you know me?” said I, grasping his hand; but recognition had flashed on him at the same moment.

“Know you? Yes, Lucien La Touche, I do now, though I did not at first. The rain is so heavy, I am so bewildered here, and I never expected to see you.”

“Why not? I live hard by, and you will come home with me. Rhoda will be delighted to see you. But why did not you write to me? why didn’t you let me know you were coming to London? and what on earth made you take lodgings in Bloomsbury, when you knew we lived in Bayswater? I must get that out of

you, and we must get out of the rain. Come along, and we'll astonish Rhoda."

"Do tell me my way, Lucien. I'll come and see you some other time;" and he half drew back, as I pulled his arm into mine.

Something strange had come over Morton; that was my first conclusion. It might be the bewilderment of London, and his surprise. It was best to take him home anyway, and saying, "Nonsense, you'll come now," I hurried my grave and senior friend along to No. 9.

Rhoda was astonished to see me bringing home a stranger; but she had heard so much about Morton, and seen so many of his letters, that the mere mention of his name made my good sister welcome him like an old friend, and she and her faithful satellite Nelly were helping off his wet coat in a minute.

Morton was not unwilling to stay, great as had been his haste to Bloomsbury, when we chanced to meet under the pouring rain. I thought he looked happy to find himself under our roof and in our company, when the first confusion or surprise had worn off, and he and I, both made presentable with the dry clothes remaining in my wardrobe, were seated com-

fortably in the little parlour, where Rhoda had lit up a bright fire, spread a hospitable table, and busied herself to entertain her brother's friend. Morton was changed, and doubtless so was I, since we parted on board the *Franklin*; but he looked older than he should, and thinner too. The cheek-bones of his Scottish face were more sharply defined; there was a slight sprinkling of grey in his hair, and his likeness to Forbes was so remarkably increased in consequence, that it struck me at the first clear sight of him. They were cousins, without doubt, however they might have quarrelled; but what could have been Morton's motive for keeping his coming to London from me?

We had not written to each other so frequently of late; our friendship could not be said to have cooled; but time and distance are chilling things. Correspondence between England and America was not so rapid then as it is now, and I had to reproach myself with being so occupied about Old Broad-street and its great lady, that his last letter had remained unanswered full six months. Probably that had offended him, though Morton was too sensible to take offence readily, and all our old friendship seemed to warm up again with the light of

my home fire and the kindly ministrations of my sister.

“How strange it was, Lucien,” he said, after looking on me, my surroundings, and Rhoda, with the earnest, friendly gaze of former times, “how strange it was that I should have taken the wrong coach, got set down at Tyburn Gate, and wandered so far out of my way in the heavy rain, so near your house, and just in time to meet you coming home!”

“Strangely fortunate,” said I; “but why did you not write to me, why did you not let me know you were coming, and why did you not come here in the first instance?”

“I was obliged to come,” said Morton, skilfully evading my charge, “on account of some property left me by my uncle, one of my mother’s family; he was in the Stamp Office here, and his property is all in houses, mostly about Bloomsbury. The affairs are rather tangled between lawyers and tenants, but I hope to get something out of them, as I am the only legatee. You have not heard,” and a shadow of deep sorrow passed over his calm face, “that my mother is gone.”

The announcement of death always startles us, though it is the one thing to be expected.

It astonished and grieved me to hear that the kindly and hospitable old dame, to whom my lonely childhood owed so much, Morton's good and well-beloved mother, the only friend, almost the only associate he had, was taken from him.

"The climate of America was too much for her, I fear," said Melrose, making a strong effort to recover himself from the backward rush of sorrow which came with our meeting and talk; "its great extremities of summer's heat and winter's cold are trying to any constitution; and it may be weak-minded, but I could not stay there alone, though the Mortons are kind enough, and wanted to promote me to Mr. Alexander's place. The old man is gone. Andrew is head-master now, and the Grammar School is as full as ever you saw it, Lucien."

"Will you settle in London, then?" said I. It would have been a joyful thought to me once, but now the near neighbourhood of the friend who had warned me of the Joyces, though not dreaded, was not exactly wished for; it might be difficult to keep my goings to Old Broadstreet and all that concerned them from him.

That broken and cancelled engagement which lost my uncle's grace had made us strangers

long ago in Baltimore, and now I had something still harder to explain.

“I don’t know,” said Morton, but he looked as if he did; “the business will be a good while in getting settled, and I had better be on the spot. It was an old-cherished design of mine to go back and settle in the quiet country town where I was born, if ever fortune enabled me, and that may be the case at last.”

“But in the meantime you will come and stay with us,” said I; “there is room enough in our house, and Rhoda will be kind to you.”

“I am sure she would be kind to anybody,” said Morton (my sister was out of the room just then), “but I had better stay in Bloomsbury; there is a deal of lawyer seeing to be done. I am a crusty old bachelor now, and poor company for a bonnie lass, as we used to say in Scotland.”

“You forget that I am here, Mr. Morton, and your cousins the Forbes’ live within ten minutes walk.” I had spoken without thinking, but the sudden expression of alarm, or rather terror, that came over his face made me stop short.

“Lucien,” he said, speaking low and hurriedly, “I know they do, but I don’t want to

see them, and they don't want to see me. Private and family reasons which cannot be explained or entered on make it best for us to avoid each other. Will you act a friend's part, as you have always done, and let us remain separate and at peace?

“Do not speak of me to them, or of them to me; it is a strange thing to ask, but, Lucien, it is the kindest thing you can do to both parties; and now that we are alone, I will confess that it was nothing but fear of the whole subject which kept me from writing to you about my coming, or letting you know that I was in London. But Providence directs our steps, however we may take them; you and I have met, and I must lay that obligation on your friendship.”

“It is a small one,” said I; “there is no use in denying that it seems strange, but any request of yours is a sufficient bond for me. I know the motive is a good one, though you do not think fit to explain it, and I promise to keep distance and silence between you and the Forbes’.”

“Thank you, Lucien, thank you,” said Melrose, leaning back in his chair with a sigh of relief. The man was weary and desolate, not

unlucky, perhaps, for he had got a legacy, but what a desperate and impenetrable quarrel was that between him and the serious banker? Rhoda came back, and I observed her hair had been newly smoothed.

Morton congratulated us on being found so comfortable, told me that my uncle was getting very old-looking, and not much improved by his marriage; that he had removed to one of the principal boarding-houses in Baltimore, the company in West-street being too dull for the quondam Mrs. Maynard and her son, who everybody said would be able to spend the old gentleman's gatherings. He had a great deal more news about the Mortons and my grammar school acquaintances.

He heard the whole history of Rosanna's defalcation, but not my acquiescence, which, however, he seemed to understand and expect, and he assured me, almost in the words of his cousin in Notting Hill House, that I had missed her well. Morton knew me better than Forbes did, for our intimacy was earlier.

He did not know, and he could not guess, that the spell had been broken by a stronger one; but he perceived that my mind had changed, and required no condolence on being left to

wear the willow. There was no more coldness, distance, or offence with himself; it was the Forbes' and not me or my sister he wanted to avoid.

An unceremonious invitation made him consent to stay for the night, which continued to rain; we discussed everything except that one forbidden subject before we retired. We met next morning at breakfast, as we used to meet in the old grammar school days, and set out together in the clear fresh morning, I for the bank and he for Bloomsbury. No invitation could induce him to make our house his home, and guessing it was because the Forbes' were too near it, I did not press the matter.

“You are right not to ask him, Lucien, dear,” said Rhoda, when I explained the case as well as I could explain it to her in private; “quarrels between relations are always the worst kinds of wars; and it is strange. Mr. Forbes is such a good Christian man; I am sure it wasn't his daughter's fault; and your friend Mr. Morton is uncommon sensible; but they're are Scotch, you see, and stiff-necked, as our father used to say.”

It was not a complimentary conclusion regarding my friends, but it seemed to me, as

well as to Rhoda, the only way of accounting for wrath so long and inveterate that neither party wished to see or hear of the other after the lapse of eighteen years. To my own knowledge, Morton had been in Baltimore that length of time, and according to Helen's statement, the dispute had taken place in Dublin. Rhoda guessed, and I made sure that it was not her fault; she had spoken kindly of her cousin Melrose.

He had told me that the cause of the separation was a family one, and something very particular it must have been, since Forbes thought proper to keep it from his daughter. At any rate, I could not keep peace between them, and sound policy as well as honour bound me to keep the promise I had made to Morton, so the people of Notting Hill House heard nothing of his existence, and I saw no sign that they knew of his being in town.

The warm welcome and shelter found in our parlour that wet evening, seemed to have impressed my early friend favourably. Though Melrose would not stay with us, he was willing to come. Evening after evening I found him at the bank door, and he went home with me; Rhoda made him welcome, and I gloried in the

opportunity, now that he had no home in London, of returning his and his mother's hospitality to my childhood, when it had no home but that of the grammar school in Baltimore.

He came and sat at the hearth and board, and though he would not tell me his cause of quarrel with Forbes, Melrose and I got back to the old familiar footing on which we stood before the Joyces came in my way, and I had but one difficulty, namely, to keep from his knowledge the direction of my goings on Sunday evenings. Though Scottish and Presbyterian, seriously-minded and truly religious, Morton was neither strait-laced nor penitential like the Forbes', and being a stranger in the dullest of all towns on Sabbath-days, it went against my conscience not to ask him to No. 9; but then one must give up one's fairyland in the villa, which was not to be thought of—and friend as he was and had been, Melrose was not the man to hear that tale.

He had a quarrel to keep from me, and I had a friendship to keep from him. I think he guessed there was something in the wind at last, but Morton had given up investigating; keeping clear of the Forbes' and releasing his

uncles' houses in Bloomsbury, seemed to be business enough for him: he came and went, asked no questions, and we continued to be fast friends.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FORBES IS ILL, AND DISTRUSTS ESTHERS.

I HAD not observed it, but Rhoda did, that Miss Forbes latterly called at our house less frequently than she used to do. "It's not getting proud and high she is, I am sure," said my sensible sister, "Miss Forbes is above such foolery; but, Lucien, I don't like her looks at all—there is something past the common troubling that young lady, for all her father's riches and her own goodness.

"I have heard her sigh in this room as if her heart were like to break, when she came in from visiting the poor people in the village, and didn't know it herself, being so used to the sorrow and taken up with it; I don't know what it is, Lucien, but there is something wrong and getting wronger about that house; it is not Mr. Forbes' business, for Watt Wilson says there

is not such a safe place in London, barring the Bank of England; but Nelly tells me she sees him coming home, when she is out on errands, sometimes, and he don't look a bit more cheerful than his daughter, but she thinks worse and more down-hearted."

Similar reflections had occurred to me so often that I took little notice of Rhoda's remarks, till one Saturday evening when I came home, intending to go over to Notting Hill House, my sister informed me that Mr. Forbes' footman had come with a message. Miss Helen sent him to say that her father was very ill, but she hoped I would come over to see him in the course of the evening.

The Forbes' kept up serious gentility and so did I in my intercourse with them, intimate though it was; the strictest social regulations must be preserved wherever Miss Forbes had sway, as she undoubtedly had in her father's house; it was not proper for her to receive me, but I was expected to go over and see Mr. Forbes. I went accordingly at a discreet hour after their dinner-time.

The house, was, if possible, quieter than usual; I saw nobody but the serious footman, who said, in reply to my inquiries, that his

master had not been able to go to business for two days, and was then confined to his bed; would I please to walk up to his room? I walked up; it was a back room on the second floor of the old house with a low ceiling, and two narrow windows, as our ancestors were accustomed to form their bed-rooms.

I had seen the wealthy banker dine sparingly, and water the good wine he pressed so hospitably on me, but I was not prepared for the anchorite meagreness and discomfort of his chamber; its floor had no carpets, its windows no hangings, two coarse blinds kept out the sun and moonshine; no fire seemed to have ever been in the grate; there was a bathing-tub, two cushionless chairs, an uncovered deal table with a razor case, a small shaving-glass, and a Bible on it; and in the middle of the room a plain, curtainless iron bedstead, with mattress and fittings of the hardest and coarsest description—on that bed the rich Mr. Forbes was lying; and close by, reading, I suppose, a sermon-book by the light of the one candle which made the dreary room look still more dreary, sat his daughter and heiress.

Sick and sad he looked, but the latter more than the former, and in expressing my concern

and making the requisite inquiries, I got over the appearance of surprise at his accommodation.

“Sit down, Lucien; I am glad to see you. It was kind of you to come, lad,” said the banker, after shaking hands with me—how thin and yet muscular his hand was—and Helen, as she placed the only remaining chair for me, said, “You will not find this room very comfortable, I fear, but it is papa’s peculiarity to have it so furnished. I could not induce him to make any improvement.”

I sat down, she closed her book and glided away, and Mr. Forbes and I got into conversation. It was merely on business matters as they stood in the city, the news of the day, and his own illness, of which he did not give a very distinct account; but Forbes spoke little on personal subjects; it was a cold, he thought, or influenza; the spring season did not agree with him of late; he was getting old, and these were warnings that the clay tabernacle was to be taken down. I ventured to hint that more comforts in his sleeping apartment might be advisable, but Forbes stopped me.

“No, no, Lucien, such things don’t suit me; I don’t say a word against them for other

people, neither do I hold the papistical notion of merit in self-denial or mortification ; but I need them, Lucien, I need them ; the old Adam in me requires to be kept under—it does in us all, lad, but most in me, and every man is wise to practise privately that way which conscience tells him is the best for him. Lucien, you have a clear conscience,”—he looked me in the face earnestly for a minute, and then covered his own with his hands—“keep it so, my boy, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil ; especially don’t let money tempt you, that is the Evil One’s strongest weapon against souls. Esthers tells me you are acquainted with Madame Palivez,” he continued, and I nearly sprung from my chair ; “you go to her house, her private residence, and her villa, I understand, Lucien ; I don’t say there is evil or danger in it, for I know little about her ; but she is a strange lady by all accounts, and you are a young man not much acquainted with the world yet, and not likely to see a snare till your feet are in it.”

“I assure you, sir, Madame Palivez or anybody else, as far as I am aware, has set no snares for me ; it would scarcely be worth the trouble.” I was able to speak by this time, and

to comprehend that my well-kept secret—the visits which he had never appeared to notice, never hinted at—were known to Esthers, and published in Notting Hill House.

“I don’t say she did, lad; but you are a young man, and having escaped one peril of women, have a care that you may not fall into another; though fair to look upon, and in good repute with the world, they that know her best say that Madame Palivez is a woman without religion, or belief of any kind. Lucien, we are all too apt to lose our hold on that anchor of the soul, when sore temptations or besetting sins drive us, but what will they do who disown and cast it from them?

“I allow she does business well and honourably, but she lives in a strange manner at home; there are strange tales abroad about her family—a proud, foreign race, who made money in all countries but their own, married among themselves only, and never one of them lived to old age. She is the last of them, but as proud as any, and will never give up her bank power and riches to any man, whatever hopes she may give them for her own ends or amusements, as such women do. Lucien, my lad, have a care, I speak to you as a friend, don’t let your heart

be wiled away and your life shipwrecked as others have been."

"I assure you, sir, there is no danger. Madame Palivez is too far above me in fortune and position to have either ends or amusement in setting snares for me, were I foolish enough to fall into them; that she has taken some notice of me as her clerk, I gratefully acknowledge; and I am sorry that her manager has nothing better to do than carry such absurd tales."

I would have said more, but Forbes interposed:

"Easy, easy, lad; it was not the manager that put me up to all I have said and thought about you and her; he did mention your acquaintance just by accident once or twice, but Esthers is a discreet, close-thinking man, very capable in business, very sincere and religious, I think, as far as his light leads him; man can go no farther; but he is seeking for truth, and will come to it, with God's help. I don't think he is given to carry tales or meddle in people's affairs; what's your opinion?"

"I believe he is, sir, very much given to both." Madame's warning was in my mind, but must not come out.

“ Judge charitably, lad,”—Forbes’ hands were down, and he was looking keenly at me—“ judge charitably ; but what reason have you to think so ? ”

“ A thousand reasons, sir, but all too small to be quoted. I know it by the man’s daily practice in business, and out of it ; he is continually ferreting at something which does not concern him, continually prying into people’s private doings ; and, to speak as a friend, Mr. Forbes, as I know you have spoken to me, his tales about Madame Palivez, and his pretence of turning Christian, are, in my opinion, equal impositions, made for some crafty end. Of one thing I am certain ; he has some design in getting into your house and society, though I know not what it is, and I am almost equally sure that he would oust me out of it, if possible.”

“ Nobody will do that, Lucien ; but tell me, now, tell me what is it that makes you think Esthers has a design ? ” the banker looked as earnest as if, not his money alone, but life and death, depended on the subject ; the very appearance of sickness passed from him as he raised himself on the bed, clutched the coverlet with both hands, and fixed his eyes on me

Was there ever such a hopeless task as trying to prove to another that which one knows by a thousand signs and observations not to be mistaken, but which melt into no evidence, and mere surmise when reduced to words?

I was brought to that test, and with the usual result; what I had to tell of Esthers manœuvres and sayings would be reasoned away by any person inclined to judge charitably, and afraid of coming to hasty conclusions, as the Scotch banker was. It was vague and unsubstantial, even to my own ears, and part of it could not be told, for it concerned Madame Palivez; in short, I came to the usual case of people who attempt to warn others of the rocks they cannot distinctly point out, and after sifting my circumstantial evidence anxiously and attentively for nearly an hour, Mr Forbes civilly gave it up as a mare's-nest of my own discovery, and hinted that I should entertain no prejudice against Esthers, on account of his being Madame Palivez's cousin and heir-at-law. I had been bound over not to publish the contrary; I was afraid of losing my temper in case of any more advice against the snares, and therefore allowed him to drop the subject, apparently satisfied that I had proved nothing.

“But, Lucien,” said he, “you wont take it ill because an old man, who has not been over-wise himself, maybe, advised you to take care of getting entangled by the fancy? No man ever gets safe over the like; if he escape, he leaves half his heart behind him, and that with a woman who neither cares for nor values it.”

Was there a true prophecy in that warning? Perhaps Mr. Forbes saw the thought in my face, for he added, like one whose stroke had told, “Take my advice, lad; look about you for a sensible, serious-minded, faithful wife, one that will love you honestly and truly, and if she have the wherewithal to help your business and housekeeping; men must look to those temporal things while they are in this world.”

As he spoke, the door was softly opened, and Helen stepped in. I knew Miss Forbes had not been eavesdropping, it was beneath her character and custom; but consciousness is more difficult to hide than conscience, and Helen looked conscious of what we had been talking about; it had been talked over between her and her father; I knew it by her look and by her movements, as she glided into the uttermost corner of the room, and sat down in the one vacant chair. Mr. Forbes immediately

hemmed, and asked her what the night was like. Helen said beautiful and starry—we had all recourse to the weather, by way of change, and seeing it was getting late, I rose to take my leave.

Forbes thanked me for coming to see him, advised me, in a low tone, to think of what he had been saying, and not to take it ill.

“I will take nothing that you say in that manner,” said I; “it would ill become me; I know it was all spoken in friendship: though, believe me, sir, you are misinformed.”

“So much the better,” said Forbes; “though you ought to say mistaken, lad. Oh yes, I will soon be well enough, it was only a cold,” he continued, in answer to my wishes for his recovery, and I saw him cast a well-pleased look after Helen and me as went down stairs together. Her colour had risen in the room, but it was gone before we reached the hall below.

“What do you think of my father’s sickness, Mr. La Touche?” she said; there was no servant within sight or hearing.

“I trust he will soon be better; how did he catch cold?”

“I don’t know,” said Helen; “I am afraid

there is something working on his mind. I can't understand it, my father has always been reserved about his inward strivings ; we have all such, owing to our sinful natures ; but I fear he has fallen into spiritual despondency, thinking his state worse than it is ; yet, oh, Mr. La Touche, if he be in danger, which of us can be safe ? One ought to place no confidence in good works, but they are evidences of faith, as the apostle tells us, and where was there ever a more faithful, pious, self-denying life than his ? My father has been blessed with riches ; I know his heart is not given to them ; he looks on himself only as a steward, and it would not become me to tell you the amount of his charities ; yet you see, he refuses to have the commonest comforts in his sleeping-room, and mortifies himself in so many ways of late, not to speak of other signs I see, that it seems to me he is falling into a kind of despair, if that could happen to a righteous man."

"Might it not be well if your minister conversed with him ?" My association with the Forbes' had made me understand what suited them.

"He does come here, and my father is always willing to converse on religious subjects, but it

does no good. There is something in his mind, Mr. La Touche, something I cannot fathom; do serious, sensible people like him ever lose their judgment?" She had come close to my side by this time, and the face that looked so old and worn before its time, was white as if with deadly fear.

"No, certainly not," said I, speaking in great pity, yet only what I believed; "Mr. Forbes is as clear and collected to-night as I ever knew him to be; whatever may disturb your father, depend on it his judgment is safe."

"Oh, of course it is, but I am foolish and don't know what to think, and one magnifies trifles. I think we live too retired"—she had hit on Madame Palivez's solution—"my father dwells too much on little things; you see, our cousin, Melrose Morton, has come to London, he visits you, as was to be expected, did you not tell me you were friends in Baltimore? but my father saw him going home with you one evening this week, and it upset him so. He never would tell me what they quarrelled about; perhaps I should not ask, but they say it is natural for a woman to be curious; do you know what it was?"

“I do not, Miss Forbes, Morton would not tell me; but he gave me to understand that he and your father had reasons for keeping apart, and asked me not to mention the one to the other, which I promised to do.”

“And you’ll keep your promise, I know, Mr. La Touche”—what a warm kindly almost affectionate look she gave me, and how fair it made the woman I always thought so plain—“you’ll keep your promise, and I would not tempt you to break it, if I could; but there is one thing I was going to ask you”—she blushed up to the very brow.

“Ask anything, and I shall be happy to do it, Miss Forbes.” That was spoken in all sincerity.

“Thank you—thank you. I know it, or I would not ask the like; yet I am afraid you will think it strange”—the good, gentle, pure-minded woman was conscious of more than she meant to say—more than I could guess at.

“I’ll think nothing strange that comes from you.”

“Well, then, you know Mr. Esthers comes here on Sundays. We have got into that—

I wish we had not—and I can't help believing some of what you said about him. Maybe, it is wrong to think so, and my father won't acknowledge it; but Mr. Esthers' talk does disturb him. I don't know why, and I can't understand it; but will you come on Sundays too, and keep us from being alone with him?"

If she had been talking about a haunting spectre, poor Helen could not have trembled more, or looked more terror-stricken; but what was it she asked of me?—to come on Sundays, and give up the waited, watched-for hours with Madame Palivez.

Was it a ruse to keep me out of the snares? There was no trick, no cunning in poor Helen's face, and the Forbes' had been such friends to me as no man ever had; but, oh, the selfishness of human nature!—small and queer as the request seemed, it was all I could do to serve them, yet I shrank back involuntarily; and she caught my blank look before I was aware.

"You can't come—you would rather not—perhaps you have another engagement?"

The tears were positively gathering in her

eyes, and both heart and conscience smote me.

“I had one, but I will put it off, and be happy to do so, if my presence can serve you in the smallest degree. Will Esthers come while your father is so ill?”

“Oh yes, yes,” said Helen, in a frightened whisper, “there is no putting him off; we have tried a thousand ways. But it is so good of you.”

She was all smiles now.

“Not a bit. Will your father be aware of the arrangement?”

“I’ll tell him; he knows it partly already. But you won’t say a word about it to him, or Morton, or anybody? It looks so queer a thing to ask; but I’ll never forget your kindness, Mr. La Touche.”

“I wish I could do you a kindness, Miss Forbes; but depend on me being with you on Sunday evening, though I may be a little late.”

Théré was a sound of some coming step; she moved from my side, and I said, in a louder key,

“No doubt your father will be much better by that time.

“I hope he will,” said Helen, “but

I have detained you shamefully. Good-night!"

And with a warmer shake-hands than I ever thought she could give, we parted at the hall-door.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT DOES ESTHERS EXPECT?

THE night was beautiful and starry. I walked quickly away from Helen, but paused on the road at the end of the lane, to look back on the old solitary house, shut up among its grounds to the right, and up the path beside the stream to the left, winding deep into the heart of the Park, and leading to Madame's villa.

The house never looked so lone and dreary—the path never seemed so wild and green; and I stood there, with the inward conviction that both the Forbes' and Esthers were striving, though not in concert, to break up my friendship with Madame Palivez. No reflection on all that had passed with Forbes or with Helen could bring me to any other conclusion. I knew the manager was doing

the worst part of it; I knew he had the worst designs.

The Forbes' fear of him was unaccountable; but I feared neither the Jew nor anybody else where Madame was concerned. Neither he nor the Scotch banker would part me from her friendship—if it were so much, it was nothing more; and she and they spoke strangely of each other—knew more than I did, perhaps—and they had made me lose my chance of seeing her on Sunday evenings.

Well, there was the path to her villa; it was not too late, I would go and tell her all. She ought to know it, and would thank me, maybe; at any rate, it would keep our friendship safe from the manager's machinations. So up I went, and through the trees; every step was known to me, and I never parted with the brass key, night or day.

There was the villa, and the starlight shining on it—the great trees growing leafy round it, and the breath of violets coming up from lawn and garden. I opened the gate, saw lights above and below, caught a glimpse of old Marco looking out of the verandah to see who was coming, and inquired if Madame was at home.

“Yes, signor;” he made his Eastern bow, and pointed to the stairs. I ascended, and there she sat in the room I had seen so black, but now sweet with flowers, and lit up with wax candles. And Madame herself—what a contrast to her last appearance there!—in a rich evening dress—the newest fashion from Paris, I suppose—white lace over violet-coloured satin, looped up with bunches of violets and pearls—all tuckers and flounces—low cut and short-sleeved, as evening dresses were then, to show a neck and arms that might have served a sculptor in his best attempt at Venus—so round, soft, and snowy they were—and set forth with the best advantage with necklace and bracelets of gold and pearls.

Her beautiful hair was dressed partly in flowing curls, partly in braids, bound with a coronet to match, which looked like a crown with wreathed violets and strings of pearls falling from it among her jetty curls. I had never seen her so dressed before, and was taken by surprise. It was strange to have left the comfortless chamber, with the sickness and sadness that lay in it—the worn face of Helen Forbes, and her dark, sober trim—and find myself all at once in such presence.

She had heard my step, and was waiting for me in a graceful, careless attitude, with a bouquet of hot-house flowers in her hand, and a rich Eastern fan lying at her feet. "Welcome, Lucien," she said, smiling on me as I entered; "come and shake hands with me. I have been dining at the Russian ambassador's, and am tired to death of a large dull party. By-the-bye, I was thinking of it just as you came in; what is your opinion of death, Lucien?"

"Upon my word, Madame, I am afraid I have no opinion just now upon the subject."

"Just now; but you have formed a general one; is it the greatest or the least of all evils; is it no evil at all, but only the greatest good that life has for us?"

"I don't know, Madame; why do you ask me?"

"Because it is our common lot, and my own turn is coming on."

"Your turn!" I could not help looking at her from head to foot as she talked so in her lace and satin, flowers and pearls, with the brightest bloom I ever saw on lip and cheek.

"Yes, my turn; did you think it would never come?"

"You don't look like it, Madame."

“No;” she glanced at herself in the opposite mirror with more of queenly pride than woman’s vanity; “but the greenest grass may be nearest the scythe. I have got a warning sign to-night, my friend; the skeleton hand beckoned to me through the flare of plate and the flash of diamonds; but you have come on business? I know it by your look. You know you are always welcome, but I thought this evening was sacred to your Scotch friends the Forbes’?”

There was but one way for me with Madame. I related as clearly as I could all that had been said and done in Notting Hill House, keeping back only the banker’s warnings against snares and entanglements, which I dared not repeat, because they had hit on the truth, but I told her all their fear of Esthers, my own inability to account for it, his knowledge of my visits to her, Helen’s request, and my promise.

She listened calmly, as was her wont, but evidently in deep thought, sat for a minute or two reflecting when I had finished, and then said, “You did right, Lucien, to promise, and you will do right to go. I am sorry for your friends; they are good people, and have been kind to you and yours. There is some unsound spot in their lives, all the worse because it must

be hidden, and Esthers has got his eye upon it. I am sorry for them ; my manager never gives up anything he is fairly bent upon, and he is bent on that, not from mere curiosity. Esthers has an end ; can you not guess it ?”

“ I really cannot.”

“ Well, consider a moment ; Mr. Forbes is rich, Helen is the only daughter and heiress ; the wealthy banker and the serious young lady, with all their guid Scotch blood, might not think the Jew an eligible match, but could he discover the misfortune or the crime—don't start, they are often the same things, my friend—which would put them in his power through fear of the world or the law, might not Esthers make his own terms, and become son-in-law and successor in the bank ?”

“ But,” said I, “ do you suppose it possible that a man like Mr. Forbes could be guilty of anything which would give the manager such power.”

“ I don't know, Lucien,” and she looked so thoughtful, yet so disembarassed ; “ I don't know ; Mr. Forbes is a good man—good beyond the power of creeds or customs ; but he may have been unfortunate ; there may have been a moment when the evil angels, the rulers of dark destiny, had power over him.”

“What do you suppose, then, Esthers has to discover?” said I; it was evidently not her own secret, and her words tallied with signs about the banker which had puzzled me.

“Once more, Lucien, I don’t know; I have suspicions which I will not tell you, for they should not be uttered without proof. Were it not that an unusual fit of sincerity has come upon me, I would not say so much; but we are friends, and you will understand me. I am sorry for the Forbes’, and I will take measures to prevent Esthers, as far as in my power; that is not what I could wish. Though he is in my employment, there are family and business reasons which do not allow me to deal with him as summarily as may be requisite. But I will do what I can, and so will you; it is your duty and your privilege. Go to them, Lucien, stay with them, support them against the Jew; he can’t worm so well in the presence of another, and whatever you get cause to suspect, whatever you may find out, (for you are one of the few among mankind destined to see the hidden and read the secret, and they are of the many that will not carry their concealment to the grave—strange that we all wish to tell our tales on this side of it) whatever you may learn, then remem-

ber and believe that Forbes is a better man than most of the safe walking people, and that his daughter would be better worth winning than the fairest face in your acquaintance.”

That woman without doubt had a prophet's power of seeing and showing the true. Her judgment, thus briefly given, of one whom that very hour had placed in such disadvantageous contrast with herself, fell on my mind like the flare of a torch upon a twilight room. It brought me a strong and sudden conviction, as truths in which we have a personal interest are apt to come home to us, that for the empire of my inner life the banker's daughter and the bank lady were unconscious rivals, but rivals nevertheless. And she had opened my eyes to the fact voluntarily, perhaps by premeditation, another proof that I had no hold on her heart. Yet how did it happen? I had seen Helen Forbes often, often acknowledged to myself her good qualities, and thought it was a pity the banker's heiress had nothing but them and her father's wealth to recommend her; but now in the presence of so much external and intellectual attraction, the moral worth, the inherent excellence of the otherwise plain woman was made clear to me beyond all comparison

and price, and also that my better hold and hope was there.

I had not dreamt of this yet, it was a true discovery. Mine was a divided life once more ; there was no change of affection, no breach of faith now to be reckoned for, but there was a clashing of royalties, for the one woman reigned over my imagination, and the other over my reason. It is well with the man who has never known those opposing empires, for their strife is strong and strange, and who can say that the former is not the most powerful ? I felt that as my thoughts passed like lightning from the present to the absent ; I valued, I believe in Helen, but I was the vassal and bondman of Madame Palivez, convinced of her verdict, yet displeased she had spoken it, and stammered out, "I don't understand you."

"You do, Lucien," she said, looking me in the face archly but kindly, and laying her white jewelled hand on mine, as a mother might have done, to impress some good counsel on her eldest son—"you do understand me, and you will do so better in time, for you have sense and judgment, considering your want of experience. But we will talk no more on the subject now ; Helen Forbes and her father have been

and are your friends: they are in difficulties, not tangible ones, to be sure, but all the worse for that, and you are bound to stand by them, to serve them to their best ability, and think the best of them and their doings, all which I know you will do like a loyal man—a character of which this world affords us few examples; yet I think you are one of them, and I believe you will find your account in it, which does not always happen.”

“I would stand by them and by any friend, by anybody that wanted my help; but what can anybody do to help, Madame, where one is not allowed to know the necessity, or rather the cause of it?” I was speaking at herself now, like a displeased man whose vexation could not be put in words.

“If, as you say, and I think very probable, the Forbes’ have something to hide from the world and from Esthers, what service can one do them without being trusted, without knowing how or when to serve?”

“You will know it all in time, my friend,” she spoke with great composure, but the woman looked shaken within. “For the present, do what they ask you, if it be necessary to give up your Sunday evenings to them. Come to

me when you find it convenient, I shall be more at home here than I have been in other London seasons. You are always welcome, and since Esthers is aware of your visits, there is no use in taking precautions for secrecy. The matter is not worth publishing; but let them know of it, and talk of it who will," and she tossed back her coronet with a sort of careless defiance. Under the flowers and pearls, her look was growing sad and weary with that worn-out, over-worked appearance which I had occasionally noticed. But what was there to over-work or wear her?

"It is growing late, my friend, and I am growing tired. There is a proof of no ceremony between us, so bid me good night," she said, once more extending her hand and laying it on mine. I always fancied there was a spell in the touch of those soft, cold fingers. "I'll do my best to manage my manager, and keep him off your poor friends. You will support their courage, and never try to ferret out matters which will come to your knowledge soon enough."

"Do you suppose I am in the habit of ferretting, Madame?" There was no keeping down the inclination to be petulant.

“No, Lucien, I do not; for if I had, you and I should never have made up friendship. I know you better, and I would believe in you, if it were possible for me to believe in man. Helen Forbes will, for she is good and pious; has never inquired, doubted, nor done beyond the common; never found her own light at variance with the world’s laws; but good-night, my friend.”

CHAPTER XX.

PROGRESS OF THE MANAGER'S CONVERSION.

WHAT could I do but say good-night, and go? She watched me out of the room as if we had been parting for years, and looking up through the clear night, when I was fairly out of the villa, my eye caught her shadow leaning over the balcony, and I felt half inclined to go back. What did she mean by the skeleton hand that beckoned to her that evening?

She looked in the very bloom and vigour of life's midsummer. It was said the Palivez died early, and she had warned me that the greenest grass might be nearest the scythe.

Possibly it was only a way of talking the lady had in the midst of her lace and pearls, attentions from foreign ambassadors, and bowings-down of princes who wanted loans, to keep her-

self in mind that she was mortal, after the fashion of Philip of Macedon. At any rate, she had sent me away; was willing to make me over first to Rosanna Joyce, now to Helen Forbes, and doubtless to anybody.

Clear evidence that the woman did not care for me, except as a humble companion, perhaps a necessary instrument, for it crossed me at times that, according to Rhoda's surmise, she would want something done; so I took heart, not of grace, but of pride, turned away from her villa, and went home.

Having seen Madame Palivez and told my tale, I had no occasion to be late in my going to Notting Hill House on Sunday evening, though the contingency had been provided for. I arrived before Esthers, and had it been some enterprise of knightly daring, I could not have been rewarded with a brighter smile or more joyful welcome from Helen.

It made her look ten years younger, as smiles and gladness always did; but she said nothing beyond her usual greeting, except that papa was much better; had got up that day, though he was not able to go to church. She had read "The Whole Duty of Man" to him, and he would be down to dinner.

Then we got on her accustomed theme—Madame Palivez. She had seen her riding up to the villa on her beautiful horse one day last week. She thought Madame looked younger and handsomer than ever. Did not I think so?

Miss Forbes did not look at me, but straight out of the window, while she made that inquiry, and I said decidedly yes.

“You are acquainted with her, I understand?” Helen was looking out of the window still. “It must be a great opportunity for you, she is such a learned lady, has travelled and seen so much, not to speak of her standing in the fashionable world; but you never told us that Madame and you were on such a friendly footing, Mr. La Touche.”

“No,” said I, having made my preparations for the attack. “Madame received me privately as a clerk, whom she pleased to take notice of. I don’t exactly know why, fashionable ladies will have whims, I suppose, but the mention of it might have looked like a foolish boast, to which I am neither entitled nor inclined; and I know the gentleman who told you of my acquaintance with Madame did so for no good end.”

I had scarcely uttered the last words, when, as if in proof of the proverb regarding the speaking of a certain person, in walked Esthers. He had manifestly got no hint of my coming, and nothing but the face of his kindred Shylock, when he found himself caught in the meshes of the law in which he trusted for revenge, could have equalled the mixture of surprise, disappointment, and wrath, that altered the manager's countenance to something like a very bad false face, as he greeted Miss Forbes and me with words of great cordiality, and made kind inquiries after the banker's health.

Esthers was never long in recovering his composure when it was requisite. The first surprise over, he seated himself at a friendly nearness to my side, commenced conversation in an easy, familiar way, as if my being there before him was no unexpected chance, and we were two intimates meeting at the house of a mutual friend. I am not aware of having taken on airs, but I knew how long and vainly he had endeavoured to oust me, and why I had been half beseeched to come that Sunday. Yet knowing that an appearance of unconsciousness was the best policy for both the Forbes' and myself, I accepted his friendship, and kept a sharp eye upon him.

There was nothing for me to note in the course of the evening, which differed only from my Saturday experiences in being more sober and serious. Our talk was limited to religious books, the lives of ministers, and the achievements of missionaries.

Miss Forbes took in a world of tracts and pious periodicals, but her father clung to the works of old Scotch divines, of which he had a wondrous stock, ranging from Knox to Erskine, and their doctrinal portions seemed to be his chief delight.

We were all set to read by turns. I remember getting through a part of Durham on the "Psalms," hearing Helen read her share of Boston's "Fourfold State," and observing Esthers endeavouring to look impressed, and at the same time avoid giving me occasion for laughing at him; for the Jew dreaded nothing so much as ridicule from any quarter, and I was aware of the Sundays he spent at the bank. We stayed for family prayer.

The extemporaneous devotions of his Scotch Church were well illustrated by Mr. Forbes and his household. Their domestic service was an example of that undemonstrative but deep and

earnest piety characteristic of the Presbyterian Puritan.

They read verses from the Bible in turn, sang one of their Scotch psalms to an old monotonous tune, which might have been heard on the hill-side at one of Cameron's sermons. Helen led the music, and her father closed the service with an impressive prayer, couched in the language of his favourite divines, and heard or joined in by all his family in devout silence.

After the manner of his Presbyterian models, the banker's prayer was somewhat lengthy, and being a stray sheep of Rome, too much occupied with worldly thoughts, and curious regarding the people about me, I could not help taking a stealthy survey. They were all kneeling—a Scotch custom for private prayer, though they stand in the kirk.

I saw Helen, with her thin hands clasped and her face lighted up with a look of such rapt and spiritual devotion as made it seem half angelic. "How beautiful she is!" was my inward exclamation, but as I glanced to the other side, not to be observed, it seemed to me as if an evil spirit had come up to counteract the heavenly influences, for there was Esthers kneeling like the rest, apparently in fixed attention, but his

face, which he supposed hidden in a corner of the room, was turned towards me, and I had never conjured up in fancy, much less seen, anything like its concentrated malice.

If there were any truth in that old-world notion of the evil eye, his must have blasted my life. I never was supposed to be easily frightened, but that glance of the Jew, kneeling at what Mr. Forbes called his family exercise, put me on my guard in a weird, unearthly manner against poisoning or stabbing in the dark. He looked capable of that and more. Henceforth I should have to walk warily, as one that knew he had secret enmity to fear.

Yet with the hate and with the malice, there was something blended not intelligible, not rational, and as we rose from our knees, I found out that it was a look like that of the ragged man when I wrenched the long knife out of his hand, and flung him back from his hold on Madame's bridle.

The family prayer concluded our evening; the Forbes' retired early, both on Saturday and Sunday. It was about ten o'clock on a beautiful summer night, with the wake of daylight still lingering in the west, when Esthers and I took our leave on the most friendly terms with our

host and with each other. Helen bade us good-night with equal civility to each, at the top of the stair; and let me confess that I had some misgivings when the manager remarked that his way lay past Petersburg-place.

A little reflection convinced me that there was no danger; he had no weapon, my strength was greater than his, and Esthers was not the man to venture on an overt act of hostility.

He walked along down the avenue and through the lane, chatting in as friendly a manner as Charles Barry and I used to chat, only that Esthers was hard and dry by nature on any subject. His present theme was Mr. Forbes—how delicate his health was, how much better he appeared to be that evening. The banker certainly did look himself again, and I could not catch the Jew talking of anything peculiar; he certainly had not been in the ferreting-out line.

Now he spoke of father and daughter with most friendly seriousness; the knowingness and the smirks were laid aside, and to me he was as civil as one of the old Italian princes might have been to the man for whom he had bravos in waiting.

I responded with care and caution, expecting

the Jew would try to draw me out on my being found at Notting Hill House; but he made no attempt of the kind, and our talk had diverged to the beauty of the night, the fine road between us and London, the buildings that were being got up, and the number that would come down from the City to Notting Hill every Sunday if they had only conveyances, when on the Bayswater-road, within a short distance of my own street, a woman leading two children passed us. It was the look of astonished recognition she gave Esthers that caught my attention; the light was sufficient for her to see him plainly, and also to show me that she was Mrs. Muncy, the faithful liege and charwoman of our house.

The Jew did not observe her; he had subsided into a brown study, which made him quicken his steps and keep his eyes fixed on the ground, without speaking a word, till we reached the opening of Petersburg-place, when he stopped short, turned to me with a kind of grin which was meant for a sneer, and with the very hiss through the teeth of his sister in Berkeley-square, said—

“You are a great friend to the Forbes’, and the Forbes’ are great friends to you; but if you

knew everything, what sort of friends would you be?"

"What do you mean?" said I, stopping and confronting him. The manager was going to say something in reply, had actually opened his mouth, when a different impulse seemed to strike him, and with a laugh which sounded at once scornful and insane, he darted off at top speed, and was out of sight in a few minutes.

I stood looking after the man, and wondering whether or not his reason was taking leave of him; but as I turned to my own house, somebody came up close behind me, and there was Mrs. Muncy, with her two little children.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I took the liberty of waiting for you," said the honest woman, "just to tell you, because I thought Miss Rhoda and you were particular about it, that the gentleman you were walking with on the road is the same that called one day when you were all out, and made signs to Hannah Clark. I never see'd him since or before; but I would know him among a thousand."

"And you are quite sure he is the person who called?" said I.

"I would take my oath on it, sir, though she said it was Father Connolly; I knowed he was

no priest or clergyman. Oh, no thanks at all, sir," continued Mrs. Muncy, in reply to my acknowledgments; "it is right to put everybody up to what concerns them. I am bound to do more than that for you and Miss Rhoda;" and she went off with a profound curtsy.

I stood for a minute or two on the spot where she left me, pondering over that brief revelation. What a light it cast on the Jew's character and our former puzzle! He was the person whom Hannah Clark had stolen out to meet, who had probably supplied her with a key for our street-door, and instigated her watch on my goings to the villa.

Hannah's readiness to leave us, and delight in the prospect of Broad-street, were intelligible now. How he had contrived to enlist the services and secure the affections of the dumb girl was beyond my skill to penetrate; but the business was done, and she was in the bank—under Madame Oniga's supervision, indeed, but also within his reach and convenient for any purpose. Had the chances worked to his mind in that matter, or had he a hand in Hannah's translation?

It seemed to be Madame's own idea; but she knew as little of the true state of the case

as I did at the time, and Esthers' interference would have been a sufficient indication to one so keen-sighted. Hannah's conduct had been unexceptionable since her instalment in the bank.

The discipline there was strict, almost monastic, and Madame Oniga had an eye not to be eluded; but that did not explain the mystery. I knew it was an instrument, and not a mistress for which Esthers had made choice of the dumb girl; and with her instinctive cunning, natural dexterity, and unreasoning mind, he could not have found one better qualified for doing his behests without scruple or question.

There was that about the manager which assured me that ordinary folly or passion had little hold upon him. Esthers was cold-blooded by nature; it was the tenth and not the seventh commandment he was inclined to break. Madame had pointed out to me his probable purpose in haunting the Forbes'; but what purpose had he for Hannah Clark to serve in her establishment?

I could make nothing of it but to let her know the whole as soon as convenient. It was early in her evening, but I could not intrude

again on the lady's retirement. She had been in haste to part with me on my last visit; she might think it only an apology. I would show her that my heart was as free as her own. What a fool I had been to let it go after a woman who cared nothing for me and never would.

Was it true what she had insinuated about Helen Forbes? What did her father mean when he advised me so earnestly to give up Madame Palivez, and look out for a faithful wife?—and what secret was it that lay so black and heavy at the root of his prosperity, in which that foreign woman seemed to have a part, and yet no fear?

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THE HIDDEN SIN.

VOL. III.

THE HIDDEN SIN.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE HIDDEN SIN.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW COURTSHIP.

It was pleasant to step out of these dark thoughts and surmisings, as it were, into the little parlour of my own house, and find Rhoda in her best attire, presiding over a hospitable supper-table, surrounded by the honest contented faces of Watt Wilson, the two Masons, with their eldest son and daughter, and, to my surprise, Melrose Morton.

All but he had been invited for the evening (they were Rhoda's select society), and I took care that my sister should not be solitary when I went out to friends of a different order; but Melrose had dropped in unex-

pectedly, and been made welcome, perhaps he was curious as to what became of me on Sundays, but Rhoda had told him I was gone to the Forbes'.

"In course I did not think you were there, Lucien," said my honest sister, when we were alone in confidential talk, "but you said it was to be kept from all the world that you went to see the bank lady, and as it was only a white story, I thought I might as well tell it; goodness be praised that it happened to be true. He came—Mr. Morton, I mean—just when the tea was a-putting down, and in course I asked him to stay. I know that would not have been onproper in Ireland, and I hope it is not onproper here; he is your friend, and a very sensible man."

"Very, Rhoda," said I.

The habitual bloom on my sister's cheek had heightened as she spoke; a smoothing of her hair and an arrangement of her frills beyond the common had been made in the course of the evening, and it struck me all at once that the learning and the gentility found wanting in Watt Wilson were on the

side of Melrose, and that I had seen the Scotchman keeping a quiet but well-pleased eye on my sister.

The lot they were to draw came distinctly before me, an easy and a suitable one, notwithstanding that the one was a Greek scholar, and the other could never be taught to spell her mother tongue; they were both honest and true-hearted, free from vanity, ambition, and covetousness. He had knowledge enough to value Rhoda's sterling good qualities, and pass over the deficiencies which were but of surface and accident; she had sound sense enough to esteem his native nobleness and unparaded abilities. They deserved the good-fortune, never to be my own, of a happy and harmonious union.

My Scotch friend had come from Baltimore to take my sister from me, and leave me with a solitary fireside—a life overshadowed by clouds, not of my own raising, and heart going astray after Madame Palivez.

I thought of it all as I quizzed Rhoda about Melrose, and she blushed, and smiled, and said:

“He never paid her no attentions that she

could see; in course she liked Mr. Morton in a friendly way, because he had been a good friend to me—hadn't I told her so often? and he was an uncommon sensible man, she ought to say gentleman."

It was a long talk we had that night, for I told her everything except the look I had noticed on Esthers' face, and his subsequent remarks or insinuations on the Bayswater-road.

The manager was my enemy—a crafty and a fierce one; I had guessed it for some time, I believed it now; and there was reason for it on Esthers' part, for I had been made to cross his way. But why give my sister cause of dread and fearful surmise when I happened to be out late, and she was alone with nobody but Nelly, our maid, in No. 9? I could take care of myself, and I would not frighten her, so Rhoda heard all but that, and made her comments accordingly.

"I have often thought it Lucien," she said, "though not just plain enough for me to speak upon; with all their goodness and charitableness, Mr. Forbes and his daughter

could not look so down-hearted and onhappy like if they hadn't some trouble past the common. Considering their riches, too, many a time I have thought to myself the poorest beggars ever I saw on the roadsides in Ireland did not look so misfortunate; but, Lucien, that bank lady has the great sense, and I am sure it is true she tells you, whatever their trouble is, it is not Miss Helen's fault.

"I don't know about her father; he is a good man, and a great Christian in course; but rich men buy their riches dear sometimes, and will do more for money than poor ones, as Father Connolly said in his sermon about the camel going through the eye of the needle. Howmsoever, that Jew is a villain, and worth watching. To think of him taking Hannah Clark out by night and day, and making me think she was dealing with the fairies; larning her such craft, too, and sending her astray entirely if Providence don't take a hand in it; and then trying to get that good, blessed young lady and her fine fortune; goodness me, but he is the villain! Lucien, dear, there is just one thing you

ought to take care of; he'll hate you like the soot when he finds they lean to you, especially Miss Helen, as I know she does."

"How do you know that, Rhoda?"

"Well, I just can't say; Miss Forbes is uncommon proper, but the properest thinks of somebody at a time; and, Lucien, if it was the will of Providence, and you inclined to it, a better thing couldn't happen to any man. Whatever trouble is about them, it can't concern us, and there's the bank would make you a gentleman, though in course you are one already; but money is a good thing, and Miss Helen would be good without it."

I tried to disabuse my sister's mind of the idea of Miss Forbes entertaining the slightest preference for me, but it crept into my own. I had got the hint from two such different quarters; Madame Palivez and Rhoda had become oracles to me, each in right of her own peculiar wisdom, and the banker's advice seemed full of the same insinuations.

But Helen was the young lady to whom I had been made over at the villa, the successor of Rosanna, chosen for me and pressed on my

attention by the one woman to whom my heart dared not speak out. Her father was rich, and had cause for living in retirement, whereby there was little chance of a very eligible son-in-law. She was a mirror of all the virtues, though not of all the charms; might be induced to marry the humble friend of the family to whom its unpresentable transactions might have to be made known, and would afterwards, in right of her seniority and superior rank, school and admonish him, as I had heard her doing to Charles Barry.

Yet in the midst of these censorious reflections there would come, with the very same conviction which flashed on me when they were spoken at the villa, Madame's wise and noble words, "Remember that Forbes' daughter is better worth winning than the fairest face in your acquaintance."

My reason believed, but my heart did not; it clung to that fairest face and the gifted mind that lent it such ever-changing play of light and shadow; yet I could not think of Helen falling into the clutches of the Jew, and for her own as well as her father's sake I resolved to stand between her and Esthers.

The next time I saw him was in his office, endeavouring to look as if nothing particular had passed between us, and according to his custom, when there was anything to be got over, deeply engaged with the bank accounts. I had determined not to provoke or remind him; open enmity with the manager would not do on Madame's account and my own; but I was also resolute, that if he ever made such ambiguous observations regarding the Forbes' again, to demand his meaning on the spot, and in the meantime let him see I had a memory, and could not be smoothed back to intimacy.

The Jew was keen, and my manner warned him directly; he made no attempts to renew our familiarity. I don't think the man could have done it with all his craft, and it frightens me now more than it did then to think how fierce and deep his hatred must have been. It had gathered for many a month and many a season, ever since my coming to the bank; the manager's antipathy was at first sight, my fortunes and my doings had augmented it day by day, and having allowed the fire to break forth, though only at a crevice, it was impossible for him to cover it completely again.

He probably had his reasons for not provoking me, as he neither attempted to domineer or give trouble ; but by degrees, perceptible enough to me, though not intended to be so, he withdrew from my sight and company as far as business would allow, sitting mostly behind a sort of screen which fenced his own corner of the office, and frequently retiring, papers and all, to his private room.

I had been too proud to go and tell Madame of his Sunday performance, and Mrs. Muncy's revelation. She had sent me from her not very well pleased, but back I would go ; it concerned Madame's interest and domestic establishment ; it was my duty to tell her who was the unknown friend of the girl she had taken into her house to be off my hands and out of harm's way, and I was at her villa-gate next evening as soon as business permitted. Old Marco came out as I opened it, and seemed surprised at seeing me.

"Madame is not here," he said in reply to my inquiry ; "she is gone to Paris."

"Gone to Paris !" I repeated, in perfect amazement.

"Yes ; I thought the signor had been in-

formed," and Marco looked as astonished as myself.

Madame had left home that morning; he could not tell me how long she intended to stay, but he knew she was to attend the wedding festivities of the young Prince Zamoski, and preside at a ball which her friend Hagit Bey, the Turkish ambassador, intended to give on the occasion.

I turned away, closed the gate, and strode back through the thick underwood and tearing brambles. Madame was too much occupied with fashion, with princes and foreign ambassadors, to think of me or my intelligence. I had said to my sister that great ladies would have their whims, and it was plain I had spoken truly without meaning it. She had taken a whim for my company, and it was wearing off.

Once more the terrible inequality of our positions rose up before me, like an iron wall. It was all to be expected, yet the change had come suddenly, and not like herself, after saying she was to be much at the villa that season, giving me a *carte blanche* to come when I could, and knowing I would have something to tell concerning Esthers, to set out for Paris without leaving

word or friendly sign for me; it was treating a man like her lap-dog (by-the-bye, Madame kept nothing of the kind, but I had been filling its place, perhaps, and deserved to be looked on accordingly.) One could understand her recommendations of Helen Forbes now; anybody might take the plaything she wanted no longer.

Well, the great lady would not be troubled with my calls for some time, yet I would do a friend's duty by her; she should not be left in the dark on a matter which concerned her own household—in which, moreover, she had been generous to me and mine. So I went home and wrote a note, briefly stating the case as regarded Hannah Clark and Esthers, making all apologies suitable to my inferior position, for trespassing on her time and attention; I understood she had left home and would not return for some time, but I thought it my duty to apprise her, and hoped to be excused.

That note I sealed carefully, wrote "private" on the corner, took it with me to the bank next day, knocked at the private door, and asked to see Calixi. The confidential servant made his appearance exactly as he had done at the finding of the signet ring; things were going back

to that point with me. I inquired if he could forward the note to Madame; yes, Calixi could. "Was the signor's letter in haste?"

"No, it was of little consequence; only a private communication on a matter of business which Madame ought to know."

"The signor might depend on its going straight to her hands," and Calixi bowed me out.

Days and weeks passed, I cannot say how many, the reckoning of that time is passed out of my memory, but I know they seemed the longest days and weeks that ever went over me. In their course I returned to my old and oft-broken resolution to get free, and tried to think of everything but Madame Palivez. I did not succeed, though there were other matters to think of.

From the Sunday in which he had dropped in and "been axed to stay," Melrose Morton became a more frequent visitor at No. 9. I welcomed my old friend the more sincerely that there was nothing for him to find out, no goings to the villa to be concealed from his observation or comment. I knew it was not altogether for friendship's sake he came; the legacy business,

which brought him to London, would soon be settled. Melrose would have a very decent provision to begin housekeeping on, with his prudent, sensible ways, my sister's limited expenditure and certain annuity. There was no hindrance, no gainsayer in their way to a wedding and a home; and their sober, quiet courtship always reminded me of what I had read concerning German professors and their frauleins.

He would sit for hours talking with me on public news, new books, popular preachers, or any subject of intellectual interest, while she prepared the bread and butter, poured out the tea, or sat at the farther side of the table mending shirts and stockings. This scholarly conversation was not for her to take part in; but Rhoda listened to every word with unfeigned admiration, smiled intelligently enough sometimes, paid more attention to her appearance than ever I could induce her to do before Morton's advent, and stayed as little out of the parlour as her domestic avocations would allow.

Melrose did not talk to her; at times, one would have thought him unconscious of her presence; but his eye followed her when she

left the room, and lighted up when she returned. They understood each other; and I, knowing that no better match, as regarded principles and character, could be found for my sister, and none more eligible, as regarded worldly affairs, could be expected, did a brother's duty, in letting both parties see that they had my best wishes for success on their way to the altar, and afterwards; though, thereby, I should be left alone, as ever man was; and the thought seemed to make me an old bachelor before the time.

Melrose came and talked, and Rhoda listened and smiled. As his visits were always in the evening—I don't think Scotchmen could court at any other time—he missed meeting Helen Forbes, who now called oftener than ever. My sister and she were positively growing intimate; so was I at Notting Hill House, where my presence seemed singularly useful.

How Esthers came to the conclusion that I would be there every Sunday as a shield against him, I know not; but on the very next, after our meeting, he sent an apology: in Madame's absence it was requisite for him to remain at the bank that evening; robberies had taken

place in the city; suspicious characters had been seen in the rear of the premises—he might say he had received private intimation that an attempt was meditated, and Mr. Forbes knew that duty ought to be his first consideration.

I don't think the Scotch banker believed it, I am sure Helen did not; but being both prudent they made no remarks, except that Mr. Esthers was right if he thought the place in danger; and I think Forbes answered his note to that effect. But the manager was not got rid of, though he avoided meeting me; I missed him at all hours of the day out of the bank, I caught glimpses of him about the village, and about the house; they were always brief and distant, but Helen told me that he was never done calling on one pretext or other, and I had reason to believe he did the same at the place of business in Threadneedle-street.

Why the Forbes' did not cast him off at once I can only explain by the fact that hidden breaches in people's lives are apt to bring on a weakness of mind of which such pertinacious ferreters can take advantage, and the Jew had caught them in his meshes before they were aware.

“I don’t know why he comes so much about us, for we don’t encourage him now,” said Helen, when I came early one evening, and found her alone in the drawing-room.

She had commenced the subject of her own accord; she often did so to my sister; the manager seemed to have taken possession of her mind, but it was in the way of fright and aversion; yet there was nothing to hear, except that he called very often, and his talk troubled papa.

Helen was manifestly puzzled herself on that subject; she took me into confidence, though it was involuntarily, for the gentle, patient woman’s life was fretted away with the unaccountable, unexplained trouble which hung about her father’s mind. His health was evidently broken; he was looking wan and worn; his nights were restless, his meals were often untasted; yet the family doctor could not say what was the matter, and Forbes appeared unwilling to talk of his sickness, especially to me. Yet I was welcomed to his house with the same unfailing friendship, always pressed to come more frequently.

“Sunday or Saturday we shall be glad to see you. You know our ways now, lad,” said the

banker; "they are sober and sad ones, maybe, but one had need to walk soberly, redeeming the time, you know;" and Helen chimed in with her belief "that Mr. La Touche would allow for their peculiarities, and make himself at home with them."

She smiled kindly when she said it, never let me go without promising to come back soon, went downstairs with me many a time after her father had said "Good night," to see if it were wet or fine; and, whether or not it was for me she looked out of that bay window, I always saw her there when coming up the avenue.

CHAPTER II.

A SCENE IN WHICH SALLY JOYCE IS THE PRINCIPAL
ACTOR.

Is pride or principle the better fence to a man's heart? My experience seems in favour of the former, for now that Madame Palivez was letting me slip—going off to Paris without a farewell word—taking no notice of my note, and the watchful zeal it manifested for her and her house—I had not half such difficulty in avoiding the private residence in Old Broad-street, the path to the villa, or the windows in Mayfair, as I found when Rosanna and conscience were in the case.

I think it was about the end of July that all the play-going people of London were worked into a fever of expectation, thanks to the newspapers and hand-bills, concerning a dramatized

version of Sir Walter Scott's "Rob Roy," which was to be acted for the first time in London, under the special patronage of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, who had at that time strongly taken up the great unknown as a Tory set-off against the lights of Holland House, and found it requisite to be popular and charitable, because the spies were already on the track of his travelling spouse in preparation for her contemplated trial.

The Scotch play was to be performed under his patronage, in aid of a relief fund for the linen-weavers of Aberdeen and Dundee, whom the sudden advance of the cotton-trade and the power-loom had completely thrown out of employment that year. It was 1819, memorable for distress in the agricultural and linen-weaving districts. Charity was wanted, and charity was given; and London rank and fashion profited by the opportunity to get up a new sensation with charity balls and plays.

The fast-coming works of the author of "Waverley," then in the vigour of his wondrous power and produce, were looked for and welcomed with an eagerness which no novel of these modern days wins or deserves. "Rob

Roy" had been dramatized and acted in Edinburgh, under Scott's own direction. The theatrical company who played it there were coming to London, and the entire Scotch interest—a most extensive one then—were in full ferment, and their enthusiasm leavened all London, being fanned by the breeze from Carlton House.

Every one with the smallest pretensions to taste, gentility, or charitableness, was going to the theatre, where "Rob Roy" had a tremendous run, and the fervour extended to my friend Melrose Morton. He was no frequenter of play-houses even in Baltimore, and I think had grown more serious since; but Morton was born in Scotland—a native of the same border county which rejoiced in the Wizard of the North.

We knew he gloried in the fact, and Rhoda and I were more pleased than astonished when he arrived one evening, armed with tickets for the upper boxes of the theatre. Rhoda had never been at a theatre in all her life—I suppose that evening must have been an event in her calendar. She was delighted at the prospect, the more because Melrose would take charge of

her. I had nobody to take—had not been at a play since the last one to which I took Rosanna; but I liked to see such proper attention paid to my sister, while thinking it my duty to remonstrate with Morton on the expense.

There were none of the upper boxes under a guinea. “Nonsense,” said he—“is it not for the honour of Scotland, and the relief of the Dundee weavers? But do make haste and get dressed, for the crowd will be immense, and we had better be in time.”

We got dressed and were in time. I sat beside Rhoda at her first play, with Melrose Morton on the other side, in one of the most crowded and fashionable houses then drawn in London. Boxes, pit, and gallery, all were in full dress, there was nothing else admitted—and now that the drama has fallen so far, and the opera risen on its ruins, it is strange to look back on the interest and excitement which that Scotch play had for the wearers of stars and ribands, diamonds and coronets.

There they were, packed as close as their inferiors could be; and what a blaze of jewellery and flash of uniforms there were in the private boxes! My eye went there, but not in search

of the Prince Regent or his court notables. By-the-bye, Scott was among them, and I remember seeing the man whom royalty and letters both delighted to honour—being agreed for once.

But when we had squeezed back into our seats after the rising of the whole house, and the thunder of applause which greeted his entrance, I saw a party who had come late into a box specially reserved for them. One was a tall man with a dark, serious countenance, and a sort of Eastern dress; his beard was long, and getting rather grey.

There was a small demonstration made when he appeared. He seemed to know himself as a person of importance; to be a stranger, yet not unaccustomed to such scenes, and somebody behind me said, "It is the Turkish ambassador."

The other was a younger man, and a Russian. I knew him to be such by his semi-Tartar face, by the military uniform he wore, and by the critically insolent look he gave the ladies, all but one, and that was the lady by whose side he sat, to whom he played the humble servant, or at least the attentive—the third and

principal of the party, for she was Madame Palivez, fresh returned from Paris, in a rich, new evening dress, all gold, embroidery, and diamonds.

How queenly, how beautiful she looked? Venus dressed for a modern theatre! There were hundreds of glasses and eyes directed to her box. Everybody knew the great bank lady. I did not intend to be seen looking at her. I did not expect that she would look at me.

She had passed me in public many a time without the slightest look of recognition, but now, to my surprise, she did recognise me. It was but one glance at the spot where we three sat, and then a sudden expression of pain—a ghastly paleness passed over her face. Was Madame going to faint? I started up involuntarily, but sat down again. What good could I do but occasion remark? The Russian had observed it as well as I. He was speaking to her, going to make a fuss; but she stopped him, used her fan vigorously; doubtless gave a satisfactory account of her perturbation; was looking all herself again in another minute, but for a shade of pallor which still rested on her

cheek ; engaged her two gentlemen in conversation till the curtain rose, and was thenceforth occupied with the play.

It had commenced, and the house was all attention to the renowned Scotch actors, though considerable noise was still made at the doors by late comers, for whom no place could be found. One louder burst than usual in the direction of the upper gallery made me look that way in time to see Sally Joyce with her sister, once my affianced bride, and poor Jeremy, struggling in through the dense mass that filled up seat and passage, for in that cheapest part of the house there was not convenient standing-room. Sally made her way, nevertheless.

I could hear her shrill remonstrance to the public and scolding of her relatives till they were drowned by cries of 'order' and 'silence' among the gods ; but she contrived to get a pretty good post of observation, from which her tall figure, and long, thin face were conspicuously visible, and she could see most of what went forward on and off the stage, including, as I became aware, from her malicious watch, the private box of Madame Palivez and her company.

She could see us too, and I could not make

out for some time why we engrossed so much of her attention, till, among the many crushes that came behind us, I caught familiar tones, and looking round, saw Charles Barry shoved off Melrose Morton's shoulders, on which he had been endeavouring to find rest for his hands having scarcely standing-room, for the upper boxes were now getting as full as the gallery.

"Oh, Mr. La Touche," said he, transferring his attentions to my back, "how do you do? Very glad to see you. What a confounded crush there is here! Worse than the gallery; but I could not stay with those people."

"Who?" said I.

"Well, Rosanna and the rest of them. They are no company for a gentleman," and Barry steadied himself as well as he might, for I perceived the gentleman had got more of the strong waters than was good for him.

What a shabby, downward-going look he had got already, though it was but the second return from sea since his marriage! The Forbes' took no notice of him now. They had not mentioned his home-coming to me; perhaps they did not mean to be aware of it. How truly was Madame's prophecy being fulfilled! and there

she sat fanning herself and looking on the play with the air of an amused queen, while the Turk turned to her for explanations, and the Russian seemed to be taking his cue from her look.

The play went on; I have seen it a dozen times since with far more interest than I saw it then, for that private box was my stage, and the company in it far eclipsed the Scotch actors.

She looked at me, too—I know she did, though not intending to be seen; and something of painful recollection was always in the look. Was it self-reproach for the careless casting off? My vanity or folly triumphed in the thought. I never knew the pleasure of being an injured man before; but when the curtain fell on the first scene, and one could hear anything through the cheering, Melrose Morton—who, with book in hand, had been diligently making things clear to Rhoda's intellectual comprehension—turned to me with a remark on the principal actor, and added, in a lower tone, "Lucien, the officer in the box with Madame Palivez is taking particular note of you; and I don't like his looks."

"I am much obliged to him, though I have

not the honour of his acquaintance. Do you know who he is?" said I.

"I'll tell you," said Barry, coming down more heavily on my shoulders; "he is a Russian, Prince Dashkoff, the son of that woman who helped old Catherine in the poisoning of her husband. They say he would not stop at the like himself. Have a care of him, La Touche, for he looks a regular Tartar."

"I am not likely to come in a Russian prince's way, Mr. Barry."

"Well, maybe not; but, he has taken a dislike, that's certain; those high foreign rascals do sometimes. There was one of them came in the *Rattlesnake* from Malta"—here the curtain rose, and Barry's tale had to come to an end.

I had not seen the Russian taking notes; watch as I would, I could not detect him after. But I knew he had observed the change that came over Madame's face at the first sight of me; and the dread of compromising her made me resolve to slip out as quickly as possible when the curtain fell on the last scene, and the densely-filled house was thundering out its applause.

“ We’ll meet outside,” said I to Morton, well knowing that he would take care of my sister. I could have left her to his protection in a desert, for a braver, truer man never existed. It was terrible work getting out, short as the box passages are; but out I squeezed at last, stepped aside from the coming crowd to wait for Melrose, and breathe the air of the summer night.

How fresh it blows on a man’s brow after the crush, the ranting, and the footlights!—bringing the contrast between the world’s green sylvan times and our hot-pressed city life to mind. But all at once I perceived there was a boy by my side—a little page he seemed, though not in livery, and with a foreign look. “ A vous, Monsieur,” he said, slipping into my hand a card. It was Madame’s own, deeply gilt, in the fashion of those days; and on the back was written, with her own hand—“ Please to follow the bearer.”

Any command from that quarter was absolute with me; but Melrose and my sister were not to be kept waiting and inquiring. I pencilled on the back of one of my own cards—“ Don’t wait for me; I have met an unexpected friend,”

placed it, with some securing silver, in the hands of a trusty-looking messenger, with the name and a brief description of the party to whom it was to be delivered, and followed the boy.

He knew his business and his way ; the latter led through lanes and alleys of whose existence I had no idea : they threaded between great houses and through West-end courts—the last of them was a mere passage, terminating at a high wall, with a narrow gate of cast-iron. The boy opened it with a key he had, and I stepped into a flower-garden small and square, like those of old London.

A grass-plot with a few rose-bushes it seemed to be ; but the place was so dark that I could scarcely follow the boy. He waited for me at a door in the farther end, and gave three low knocks ; it was opened by a chain or spring within, for I saw nobody when we stepped into a carpeted passage, where a lamp was burning, and a straight, narrow stair led up to a sort of ante-room.

I saw that the passage, stair, and ante-room were beautifully painted, richly carpeted, and perfumed, it seemed, by the oil burned in its

THE HIDDEN SIN.

lamp ; its light was soft, dim, and dream-like ; there was no sound to be heard either without or within ; and when the boy opened a door, and motioned me to enter a room, furnished in a rich foreign fashion, hung with rose-coloured silk and great mirrors, ornamented with vases, statuettes, and flowers, I started in surprise to see Madame Palivez seated on the opposite sofa in the dress she had worn at the theatre.

I never saw her embarrassed at meeting me before ; but now there was embarrassment, and trouble in her look as she rose and extended her hand, while the boy retired, and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

“I am glad you have come, Lucien ; I wanted to see you, it is so long since we met ; so sit down.” Her fingers felt icy cold, but the clasp was as kind as ever. “Did you see me before I went to Paris ?”

“Yes, Madame ; I called to tell you about Esthers and the Forbes’. I called on Monday, too, and found you were gone ; I left a note for you in Broad-street, because I had heard something you ought to know.”

“Oh, yes, I got the note”—Madame looked

like one who was catching up threads of memory —“it was about——”

“About Hannah Clark and Esthers, Madame.”

“Yes, yes, I recollect; and you were going to the Forbes’, and were to have come and told me how he and they got on; and I did not say I was going to Paris, and Calixi forwarded the note a week after. I recollect it all.”

Had she fallen asleep since that Saturday evening, and only woke up to my existence, and the matters we had so much interest in, at such a distance of time?

“You don’t understand me, Lucien, and it is not to be expected you should; but I will explain my friend. It is a symptom of approaching death—a family one—which has come to me—a sudden failure of memory, to which all the Palivezi have been subject as the time of their departure drew near. I forgot to tell you that I was going to Paris that evening when you called. I forgot to leave a message for you—I forgot that you were to come at all. Your note reminded me of everything; but I could not answer without an explanation,

which I did not choose to put on paper ; and when I did return, I forgot there was anything of the kind to be done till I saw you in the theatre. You must have thought my conduct strange, unfriendly—perhaps unhandsome ; but that is the true account of it. And oh, Lucien, it warns me that I must prepare to go !”

“Impossible, Madame,” I said, gazing on her, as she sat before me in the strength and vigour of life’s midsummer—its bloom upon her cheeks and its brightness in her eyes. “I would take a lease—an annuity—on your life. That loss of memory is strange—stranger than anything I ever heard of ; but everybody is subject to unaccountable accidents of mind. You are not going to die for many a year ; cast the idea from you. Such omens are apt to fulfil themselves ; gloomy thoughts and fears undermine both health and spirits.”

“Yes, Lucien, you think me weak and foolish to be so frightened at the prospect of the common lot ; but you are mistaken. It is not the leaving of this,” and she glanced carelessly on the rich, luxurious room, “it is not the leaving of wealth and honour, with all that waits on them—not the quitting of this living

world—its daylights, its fancies, and its flowers—for the shroud, the coffin, and the clay—that chills my heart with a terror I cannot express. I think that death is but the passage to another life—a better one, it may be. Yet I know not—the Fates may still keep hold of us; but the uncertainty gives space for hope.

“It is not death I fear—neither did my forefathers fear it. The blood that marched to Thermopylæ with lyre and flute, that made Marathon a laurel-bearing field for all time, was in them. Our Athenian ancestors did not picture him a skeleton, with scythe and sand-glass, like your Christian King of Terrors—so profitable to priests and churches—but a youth, beautiful and fadeless as Apollo, with everlasting peace upon his brow, and a friendly hand stretched out to weary mortals, leading them down to Lethe, where they might drink and forget their griefs and burdens. They did not fear him, nor do I, with the dread of these weak and creed-stricken times; but, Lucien, Death comes on to me with terrors that are not his own—terrors for which my mental or physical constitution can never be prepared, though I have tried hard to cope with them; and there

is no help to which one can turn. The last of the Palivezi—and the most unlucky, too—all that went before me had some of their own blood to depend on in that worst extremity; but I have none—no help, no trust. Lucien—companion, friend—who came to me a stranger, yet would not remain such—saved my life, heard my secret thoughts, sat with me in the midnight watch of fearful memory—will you stand by me like a true man, in spite of the world's customs, laws, and faiths, and do me that one last and greatest service, which I have done to the Palivez that had none but me to do it?" She looked me in the face with such sad, imploring eyes, while her satin glistened and her diamonds flashed in the light of the one wax-candle, so placed that it shone full on her, and left the rest of the room in dimness.

"I will do anything to serve you, Madame, let the world say what it will; it is my duty to stand by you; tell me how——" I was going to say, but she interrupted me with "Duty, Sir?" and the sad look changed to one of tameless pride; "I wanted a friend, and you speak like a servant. I tell you there is nothing so hateful to me now as duty; it is the thing

people get paid for, grow respectable upon, keep shops and houses and go to church with. That was not what I looked for; yet pardon me," she grew softened and sorrowful once more—

"I fell into the error of desperate people, and expected too much. You are not the friend I want; you cannot be; there are great gulfs between us; your life has ties, prospects, and obligations not compatible with such woeful service."

"None that I know of—none that I acknowledge, Madame. Tell me of what the service you want consists; let me be your friend—your helper, at all hazards, what ever be your difficulty; whatever I can do against it, as far as my power, my energy, my life extends, I am ready and willing, and will hold myself happy to make any effort or run any risk for you." I had risen and stepped close up to her side, for I knew the woman needed me, and my heart was on my lips.

"Lucien," she said, taking my hand in hers, the soft white fingers were no longer cold, and the look, though still sad, was kindly—"Lucien, if I asked you to do that for me

which you must hide for ever from the world, for fear of blame and law—that which would cast a shadow over all your after-days, and come with ghastly clearness to your midnight dreams—that which would lie like a burden on your memory, not to be shared with friend or sister, with the woman whom your heart took for its latest choice, whom you found fairer, better, wiser than Rosanna—Lucien, if that were the service I wanted, would you promise and stand by me then?”

“I would”—the words came from me in a gush, like the breaking forth of long pent-up waters—“I would, for that woman is yourself; it was you I found fairer, wiser, and better than all the women in the world; it was you that made me false to the girl, before I knew she had been false to me! I never dared to say so before, because of our different stations; forgive me for saying it now, but believe that it is true, and command me!”

Her hand had shrunk away from mine as if a serpent stung it; she had covered her eyes with it, and leant back on the sofa. “Lucien, Lucien, is it come to that?” I heard her gasp out, but at that moment a shout loud enough

to startle all Curzon-street, something between a laugh and a howl, but so shrill, so wicked, so unearthly, as might have turned one's blood to hear, sounded from the opposite corner; and from behind the rose-coloured hangings out bounded Sally Joyce.

CHAPTER III.

SALLY'S BRAIN OVER-BALANCES.

“ I HAVE caught you, I have found you out, you villain, you traitor !” she cried, while her eyes glared on me through the mass of rough grey hair which dragged over them—“ out of your own mouth have I heard that you deceived and forsook my sister, keeping her hanging on, and shirking off your engagement till you drove her to marry that scapegrace, Charles Barry, that his own uncle and cousin won't associate with now. And it was all for this fine lady, her bank and her grandeur, was it? Oh, you may set yourself, and look mighty high and proper, Madame, but I have a tale to tell the world, and I'll tell it. I have seen your love-making, and your carrying on; if I had stayed

long enough behind that curtain, I would have seen—”

“Silence!” said I, seizing her by the arm, for the words she added were not to be repeated, and my senses had recovered from the shock of her appearance—“silence, and leave this room ; you shall not insult Madame Palivez when I can prevent it.”

“Insult Madame Palivez!” she cried, with another howl of a laugh ; “are you her protector? Did she tell you whom she murdered in Dublin, eighteen years ago, and shut up my brother in a mad-house for fear he would let the world know? But I’ll do it. I’ll revenge my sister’s wrongs—I’ll bring the wicked to justice—and you, too,” she cried, turning on me like a tigress, as I attempted to push her out of the room, with the unheeded threats of the law and the police. It was a desperate struggle ; the wild woman, now wrought up to frenzy, bit, struck, and tore with her nails, all the while screaming out her threats and charges in a voice which must have alarmed the whole neighbourhood, if I hadn’t kept it down by thrusting my handkerchief on her face, in mortal dread of compromising Madame. Her look

of composure or rather complacency was very nearly as frightful. She had started in surprise at Sally's first appearance; but all the while the latter shrieked, and struggled, and tore, she sat looking at her as one of the Spartans might have looked on a drunken Helot; and when at last Sally uttered a howl about murder which I could not smother, and fell at the room door in a terrible fit of convulsions, she said, quietly,

“Let her alone, Lucien; the woman is mad; her brain was never fairly balanced; it is fairly upset now, and will never right again. It was to be expected; I am not glad it has happened, for I know its origin; but her talk about me and my family can do no harm from henceforth. Leave her, Lucien, and leave me; there are none of my English servants in the house tonight, or you should not have been here; I want no London gossip about me and my friend; but help must be called to get the woman removed. Get out of sight as quick as you can; at the end of the passage leading from the garden gate, take the second turn to your left, keep straight through the courts, and

you will get out behind Lansdowne House. Go, for Heaven's sake go!"

"And leave you here, Madame! what if she should die in those fearful convulsions?"

"No, she won't; Fortune and she are not such good friends as that—go, go! I'm not afraid to be left alone with a woman in a fit." Madame motioned me to the door with one hand, and with the other rang her bell.

"Cyprien," she said, as the boy instantly entered, "you have left the garden gate open to-night; look at this," pointing to the writhing woman on the floor as if it had been a stray cat that had got in, while I stepped past as quickly as I could, hurried over stair, passage, and garden, found the turn to the left, got out behind Lansdowne House, and reached the front of her mansion in Curzon-street in time to see a sedate nurse-like woman and a surgeon's assistant accompanying two policemen down to the sunk flat. There were no lights to be seen, no noise to be heard within; the house stood as silent as all the rest of the street, to which the latest carriage had by this time driven home from ball or play; but in a few minutes a hackney coach drove quietly up, the police-

man and the nurse-like woman brought out a large bundle covered with cloaks and shawls, but in strange motion under them, got it into the vehicle with a whisper or two among themselves, the woman getting in beside it, while the surgeon's assistant marched after as it was driven slowly into Bolton-row, and the policemen moved down the street, counting silver like those that divide the spoil.

Should I return and see how Madame had got over it? I heard somebody inside locking the hall door; perhaps she did not wish to see me there; perhaps my presumption had offended her; yet her words, "Lucien, Lucien, is it come to that?" had a sound of grief and not of anger. But I could not go back without a sign of invitation. I lingered about the door, went round to the garden gate again; it, also, was fastened for the night, or rather the morning, for day was breaking by this time, and with a bewildered brain and weary heart I turned homewards.

The events of the night had been so many and so strange that my thoughts of them were confused and hazy. I only knew for certain the old fact, that I loved Madame Palivez—the new

one, that I had dared to tell her so—that she wanted some service of great risk and peril, and that, in spite of all my sister's warnings, I had pledged myself to do it. Pledged, and did not repent it, even then—after all I had seen and heard from the overset brain that would never right again—and the proud, stony face that looked on so complacently, because talk about her and her family could do no harm from henceforth. I was bound to the service, and could not redeem myself, long before I promised; and things would never right with me either. The conviction made me stop short on the now silent and solitary road skirting Hyde Park, and close by my own home.

The early light of a soft dewy morning was kindling from grey to golden over woodland and village. Up the green sloping lawn and massive front of Notting Hill House, so old-fashioned and lonely—up the shady path and stream, now flashing to the morning—that led to her villa, my eye wandered. I did not hear the lark go up singing from park and meadow—I did not hear a step that came along the London way till it was close by my side, and Melrose Morton's hand was laid on my shoulder, with—

“Where have you been? what has happened to you, Lucien?”

“Nothing,” said I, trying to look as I spoke; “did not the policeman give you my message?”

“He did,” said Melrose; “Rhoda and I got safe home, and we should not have been frightened about you—knowing you could take care of yourself; but as we were sitting at supper, poor Jeremy Joyce rushed in like one distracted, in search of his sister Sally. He said she had been watching you and Madame Palivez all the evening at the play, and a minute after you had gone out he and Rosanna missed her. She was not at home when they got there; and the poor fellow seemed to think something must be wrong, because Sally had been so uncommon queer of late.

“Those were his very words; and, Lucien, though neither Rhoda nor I imagined you had planned an elopement with Miss Joyce, your good sister was so much alarmed that I ventured out to look for you all round the neighbourhood of St. James’; and I’m glad we have met, for she and Nelly are sitting up alone, and must have thought the time terribly long.”

“ Well, I am safe, you see, and sorry to have given you so much trouble, Melrose ; but I could not help it. I had to go to a friend.”

“ I hope it was a true friend, Lucien. You’ll excuse me ; I am ten years older than yourself, and we have known each other long,” he said, looking me earnestly in the face. “ Your sister did not give me reason to think you might be in unsafe company ; she is too discreet, too sincerely attached to you. But I know Rhoda was not so much alarmed without cause ; and, Lucien, if you have fallen into any dangerous connexion—one which you would not wish to mention to your friends—reflect, for her sake and for your own, and give it up in time.”

“ Melrose, I have formed no connexion, either dangerous or disgraceful.”

“ Not the latter, I am sure,” interrupted Morton ; “ but the company which the world would not reckon disgraceful, perhaps very much the contrary, may lead to risks beyond the common. There was a great lady in a private box, who was aware of your presence at the play, and a Russian Prince by her side, who took no friendly note of you. Lucien, I met

that Prince in a different trim—something like his own footman, I judge—within the last hour, hanging, and taking notes too, about Madame Palivez's mansion in Curzon-street; and I am mistaken if he were not fishing intelligence out of two policemen at the corner."

I made endeavours not to appear disconcerted or angry; yet I was both. Melrose had been playing the spy upon me, and was now playing the censor. He kept his own quarrel with Mr. Forbes pretty close, and he should not intrude into my friendship with Madame Palivez—though his news about the Russian was worth hearing; it showed me the ground on which I stood. Prince Dashkoff was not selected and adjured for secret service; but he had his aims, his expectations, and believed me in the way.

"I am much obliged for your warnings, Melrose, and I know your friendship; but most people have some private affairs. It was one of mine that made me part from you last night. What great ladies may be aware of, or Russian Princes take notes of, are matters that most concern themselves. I have no preference and no rivalry to boast; but I am sorry to have alarmed you and my sister. Let us go home

together, and relieve her and Nelly," and I took his arm in our old friendly fashion.

"I'll go with you, Lucien," he said, "because I promised to come back, though I see you have no confidence in me; perhaps I had no right to expect you would; but believe that my warnings were well meant, and try to think of them at your leisure, for people see things clearer that way."

Without another word, Morton and I walked to No. 9. Poor Rhoda was at the door, looking out into the early morning for her truant brother. Raymond had gone away and never returned to us; and I knew that recollection had been pressing hard on my sister's heart, for she flung her arms about me, saying, "Lucien, dear, thank God you have come back safe!" and I promised, in a whisper, to explain everything, and told her, in a louder tone, not to be frightened at my staying out late, for I would get back again as sure as a bad shilling. Melrose looked sadly on us both, but only said he must play the bad shilling, and get home too; and rejecting all persuasions to come in and rest after his travels in search of me, he bade us "Good morning," and walked rapidly away.

When he was gone, I told Rhoda a half-true tale—that I had been sent for by Madame Palivez because Sally Joyce was annoying her—wanting money and nobody knew what, on account of her father and brother having been in the bank at Dublin. I was not sure that it satisfied my sister; but she had been used to hear the half of things; and fairly worn out with the finery, wonders, and troubles of that night, the poor girl asked no questions, but retired with her trusty Nelly to get some hours' sleep; and I, like a restless spirit, paced about our little house and garden till it was time to go to the bank.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNKNOWN VISITOR.

OF the day that thus dawned, and two or three subsequent, I recollect only that Esthers was scarcely in the office at all—that when he did come it was like one pre-occupied, and in great haste to get out again. He did not speak to me, and pretended not to be aware of my presence. Business was particularly slack with us then; and being by that time no apprentice clerk, I could do very well without the manager's oversight, and better without his company. There was little to do, but I had much to think of; the sights and sounds of that gay, luxurious bower in Curzon-street filled my hours, and made them pass in a dream of Madame Palivez.

Her talk of approaching death, her statement

about the loss of memory, the vow I had taken to her service, the words I had dared to speak to her, the howl of insane laughter from behind the curtain, the wild woman breaking out upon us with her madly malicious look, her unintelligible threats, and, clear above them all, her question to myself, "Did she tell you who it was she murdered eighteen years ago in Dublin?"

I could not forget those words—they haunted me like a nightmare; but I tried to see Madame, nevertheless—my alarm and anxiety after what had passed were surely sufficient excuses for venturing into her presence. I inquired for her at the private door in the first evening; the porter summoned Calixi, and he assured me that Madame was not there. I went up to the villa; old Marco came out, as usual, at the opening of the gate; but there she was not at home either; and when I asked him if he could tell me where Madame was, the old man said, with a look of honest bewilderment, "Signor, I cannot."

She had promised never to be denied to me; and I could not believe that system was adopted now. I had been sent for to see her in Curzon-street—would it be too presumptuous to go there and try the garden-gate? But the

memory of her words—"My English servants are not in the house to-night, or you should not have been here," checked me. Madame must not be compromised by her English clerk.

I was balancing these considerations in the last of her bank hours—I think, on the third evening—when I became aware of somebody having entered the quiet house—it was always most quiet at that hour—and making inquiries of the porter. I could catch first the manager's, and then my own name; and in another minute, the porter said, "A gentleman wishing to see you, sir," and showed in a foreign-looking man, well-dressed, but with something decidedly vulgar and mean-looking about him.

He was a stranger to me, appeared to be in middle age, and from my knowledge of the race in their comings about the bank, I recognised his features as unmistakably Russian. It was a sort of inward warning that made me give him, on his first entrance, a look of "What is your business here?" and it half disconcerted him—I suppose nothing could wholly—and he repeated his inquiries for the manager.

"He is not in the office at present," said I, "and I believe the porter mentioned to you that

he was not in the house ; but if you have any message to leave, or any particular business, I am the English clerk of the establishment, and at your service."

"Is Madame Palivez within?" said the Russian, seating himself on the nearest vacant chair, and spying at me out of his narrow eyes.

"No," said I, "Madame Palivez is rarely at the bank, but her private residence is next door. The porter will direct you to it at once."

"Does Madame not manage her own business, then? I understood she did, and had a regular communication between the two houses: in fact, I expected to find her here."

What good, plain English the man spoke, and with what a look of collected brass he gazed round the office and stared at me!

"You have not been properly informed," said I, falling to my papers and pen with as much cool abstraction as I could muster, "Madame is not here, but you will find her at home next door. If you have any message for Mr. Esthers, the manager, be so good as

to leave it, for my time is limited, and the bank will soon be shut up.”

“My business is particular—very; in fact, I am a merchant in the Baltic trade, accustomed to deal with the house, and you are Mr. La Touche, the English clerk, very much in Madame’s confidence, I understand. Can you now,” and he leant towards me with a manner at once insolent and fawning, “tell me where she is to be found? I would make it worth your while. My business is very important. She is a very odd lady, that Madame of yours—a deal of whims and private goings on, hasn’t she? You know them pretty well. Come—come—you need not deny it,” and he sidled nearer, as I was about to speak. “All the city know that you are in her confidence—far more than the Jew manager or anybody else. That’s her way. She had a clerk in Dublin taken up in the same fashion. Got to know more than was safe, maybe. She is a wonderful woman, and nobody ever knew what became of him. Some say he is in a madhouse, some say he is dead; died very suddenly, they say.”

“Sir,” said I, rising in real indignation at

the manifest intention to frighten me, "is it your particular business here to make malicious and false insinuations against my employer?"

"Oh, dear no," said the Russian, not a whit abashed, "I can arrange a little matter with her or her manager, Mr. Esthers, you call him; and as there was nobody here, I thought we might have a little friendly talk; you are a gentleman I have heard so much of. One don't feel one's self a stranger to people one has heard of you know."

"From whom did you hear of me, sir?" and I looked him steadily in the face.

"From a good many different people." The man's bluntness and vulgarity were mighty defences. "A young man taken into confidence by a great lady is apt to get talked about, and you'll allow me to say I don't wonder at her preference. There is something uncommonly prepossessing in your appearance, sir. It was that and a friendly concern for a man younger than myself that made me mention what I happen to know of Madame's ways. A man warned is half armed. I know the house and its lady well. I am an in-

dependent merchant, and have no cause to speak against Madame, but an honest regard for you."

"Sir," said I, in plain terms, "I neither believe nor thank you, and if that is the whole of your important business, I repeat that my time is limited, and the bank will soon be shut."

"Well, I can come some other time when Mr. Esthers is within, and I am very sorry you take a civil hint so badly," said the Russian, looking calmly around him; then rising without the slightest embarrassment, he added, "You are uncommon like the clerk that disappeared. I wish you a very good evening," and stepped out as quietly as he came in.

That man was no Baltic merchant, but an emissary of somebody. Could it be of the Russian Prince who took unfriendly notes of me, according to Melrose Morton's observations at the play? His errand was evidently to make out how matters stood between me and Madame. I could have pardoned that, but not his endeavour to frighten me with a story of the vanished clerk, and it must have

been a more than commonly disciplined life that kept my Irish blood from kicking him out of the office.

There was some truth in that tale which he had got hold of. It had to do with Sally Joyce's raving; probably with the ragged man whose arm and knife I had seized in time. At any rate, Madame should be apprised of the Russian's visit; that was a better apology than any I had for trying to see her in Curzon-street. Accordingly, as soon as the bank was shut, I made my way to Berkeley-square, got through the courts and the turnings, and tried the garden-gate, but it was fast. Through the bars I could see the grass and flowers, the high walls that shut them in on every side, but not the door of entrance; it was in the corner, and hidden by a rose-bush of uncommon magnitude. There was no window looking into that garden, no sound to be heard from the house, no sign of life to be seen. I retraced my steps and got into Curzon-street.

The mansion was shut up as I had seen it last, above and below there was nobody at

home or visible. To knock at the door and inquire of the person in charge, if any such there were, was a proceeding I could not take upon myself, the caution that forbade it reminded me that I should not stand there gazing at the deserted mansion, and as I turned from it without thinking where I was going, into Bolton-row, two men who had been talking together at the corner suddenly separated, one of whom I did not catch sight of in time nor where he turned to, but the other, who came forward to meet me, was Jeremy Joyce.

“Oh, Mr. La Touche,” said the ever-subdued clerk, “have you heard of what has happened to us? Sally is gone out of her mind entirely. Something disturbed her at the play, and she went off to Madame Palivez’s house. I don’t know what put it in her head, but Sally was always fond of fine places and people—so she should, her mother was a lady—and I don’t know what happened to her there. She was not at home, and I thought she had gone with you, but before I got back they fetched her in a hackney-coach. We thought it was a fit at first; but, Mr. La Touche, she has been quite distracted,

quite frantic since. We have had no rest with her day nor night—screeching and tearing with two keepers to prevent her from finishing Rosanna and me. Charles Barry would not stand it at all, and went to some hotel; the people of the house wouldn't have us any longer in their rooms. Mr. Forbes was very good; gave me a week's holiday, and came to look after her himself and Miss Helen, but they could do nothing. She only screeched the more, and talked such uncommon things; and Madame Palivez—she is always kind, you know—got her into the asylum at last, just to save our lives,” and Jeremy looked quite resigned to that settlement of the sister who had governed him with such absolute sway.

“Is Sally gone to the asylum, then?” said I.

“Yes,” said somebody over my shoulder, and there was Esthers, “Madame Palivez got her sent. She always sends people there when it suits her convenience. Sally went out of her mind at Madame's house; do you mark that, Mr. La Touche; the like has happened to people before, and may happen to people again.”

He had got in between Jeremy and me by this time, and his look reminded me so much of Sally's that I could not help saying—

“Well, Mr. Esthers, I hope it will not happen to you.”

The effect of my own words astonished me. The Jew staggered back as if I had struck him with all my strength. His dark face turned white as paper, and without attempting an answer he turned on his heel and moved away, rapidly quickening his pace till he turned the corner and was out of sight.

“Esthers don’t like it at all,” said Jeremy, keeping close to my side, as if bent on telling his woes. “You see Sally did not go to Madame’s house, and did go out of her mind there, and we don’t know what happened till she was fetched home, and she must have gone out of the theatre just after you, Mr. La Touche; and your sister and the gentleman did not know where you were, and Sally raved so about you and Madame. She always had a great regard for you.”

“Well,” said I, “I had no hand in sending her out of her mind, and I am sure neither had Madame. Perhaps there was madness in Sally’s family—I don’t mean your side of it—but Mr. Esthers is her brother, he ought to know.”

“Oh dear, yes, said Jeremy, much taken

aback ; “but there never was anything of the kind, to our knowledge. Afflictions will happen in any family, Mr. La Touche. I suppose you are not so sorry for us as you would have been once, not that I think the fault wasn't more on your side than Rosanna's ; but you are in favour, and we are little thought of. I hope it will all end well,” and Jeremy walked quickly away to the attic, where his sister was to have seen fashionable life.

Subdued, commanded, scolded, Jeremy had, as the poorest brains will have, his own notions of dignity and importance, his own small cunning to conceal and ferret out matters, and his own petty share of envy and malice to me.

What a variety of enemies I had got by that unpublished friendship ; but it was for her sake, and I took something like a martyr's pride in their increase. Moreover, would it not raise my worth and service in her eyes ? But where had she gone, and why could I not see her to make my revelations ?

CHAPTER V.

HELEN FORBES LOVES AND IS JEALOUS.

I WAS revolving these questions in my mind when very near home on the Bayswater-road, which happened to be more than usually quiet that evening; but the flutter of a brown skirt coming out of Petersburg-place caught my eye, and I hastened forward to meet Helen Forbes. She had seen, and was waiting for me, and the soft evening air had told with advantage on her generally colourless cheek, I thought, for it had taken a rosy tinge as bright as my sister's, whom she had been visiting.

“I daresay that Rhoda is glad to get quit of me; I am quite ashamed to have occupied so much of her time,” she said, after our friendly greeting; “but we have been talking about a great many things: ladies will, you know, when they get together; is not that what you cen-

sorious men say ? always finding fault with our tongues.”

I exculpated myself and sex in the most gallant manner I could assume, and Helen smiled and flushed till she reminded me more of Rosanna than herself.

“That’s all very good ; but papa and I were wondering what had become of you, Mr. La Touche.”

“I understood your father was from home,” said I ; what made me think of such an excuse ? Helen’s face fell grave and sad again.

“Oh, yes ! he was from home for a few days ; he had some business in Bath, and I partly persuaded him to go ; papa is growing so nervous and low-spirited. I am afraid he attends his business too closely, and sees too little company. I am but poor company for him at home, and he don’t care for anybody else but you. I wish you had time to come and see us as often as Mr. Esthers does.”

“Has Mr. Esthers been visiting you lately ?” I thought of his absence from the office.

“Oh, yes ! he is always coming ; when papa was from home I had to come down and tell him so plainly ; he would take no denial from

James, and you know I would not receive any gentleman except—except yourself,” said Helen, wiping her face with her handkerchief; “we are such very old friends.”

“Of course we are,” said I; “Mr. Esthers has no right to intrude where he is not wanted. If I might venture to advise your father and you, Miss Forbes, I should say make no ceremony with such a person. If a man shows himself destitute of gentlemanly feeling and delicacy, he ought to be dealt with accordingly, and get, what they call in my country, a genteel invitation to stay at home.”

“We must not be too ready to make harsh constructions, you know. Papa thinks him friendly on the whole, and believes he might get some good, some serious impressions in our society; and this is a world in which we are all called upon to do what good we can; speaking of which reminds me of the grievous dispensation meted out to the poor Joyce family. No doubt you are aware of it—poor Jeremy Joyce, our clerk’s sister, she went to a play, I understand, and was suddenly struck with madness; an awful dispensation, Mr. La Touche, and very like a judgment, though it is not right to think

uncharitably. Poor Sally! (is not that her name?) was always given to gaities and frivolities, I understand; would live in the most fashionable part of London, though the family income is narrow enough, and never gave her brother or sister peace or rest with her love of plays and spectacles. Oh! Mr. La Touche, is it not a warning?"

"A warning as regards sudden outbreak of brain disease long in the constitution," said I, somewhat amused at the serious young lady's version of the affair. "Poor Sally's head was never steady, and the insanity which I believe she inherited from her mother has at length come upon her, perhaps, as you think, accelerated by the excitement of the play, which was a very fine one. My sister and I had the pleasure of witnessing its performance," and I looked Miss Forbes very straight in the face, but the acid of Scotch Calvinism was not so easily conquered.

"I am sorry you should find pleasure in such scenes, Mr. La Touche. I am sure you can find no profit, that is, no spiritual profit," said Helen, settling into the admonishing manner once reserved for Charles Barry.

“Opinions will differ on that as well as on other subjects, Miss Forbes; but probably neither you nor I could convince each other.”

“Perhaps we could not, and perhaps it is taking too much upon myself to dispute the point with you; but I spoke as a friend, and from my own convictions;” the admonishing was all gone, and she looked sad and timid.

“Whatever you say will be honest and friendly, and I, above all the world, have a right to hear it with respect and attention.”

“Oh dear no! not at all,” she interrupted my amends-making; “you are far wiser, far more learned than I am, and though you may call it prejudice, and maybe laugh at me, I believe you will come to think as we do yet, and not be conformed to the fashions of the world which passeth away. But, to change the subject, now you will laugh at me for being curious too. How was it that poor Sally Joyce got into Madame Palivez’s house?”

“That I cannot tell you,” said I, speaking with a very safe conscience.

“I thought you might have seen or heard something of it, she raved so about you and Madame; it was dreadful to hear her going on

about a murder which she imagined you had committed that night ; I am not sure if it were you or Madame the poor creature meant, she talked so wildly, and always finished her story with a terrible dark asylum, to which she insisted you were going."

"A confused notion of her own destiny," said I.

"No doubt that is the proper explanation ; you would understand it all when you saw her," said Helen, altogether unconscious that my dread of having the boudoir scene rehearsed, or attracting the attention of the Joyces to my whereabouts after I left the play, had kept me from making the smallest inquiry in Bolton-row ; "and they have got her sent to a very well-conducted humane establishment," she continued ; "Madame Palivez did it for them. How kind that lady has been to the poor family whose father served in her bank ! She may be singular, being so very rich, and a Greek ; foreign ways are not like ours, and Madame has chosen to live single, which is always peculiar."

"Do you think so, Miss Forbes?" I had stepped close up to her, with the intention of

offering my arm, and either taking her back to No. 9, or seeing her safe home. I had got up to the quizzing point, and she had begun to laugh at her own admission, when there came along the quiet road a sound of horse's hoofs, the gleam of a white mane, the flutter of a green habit, and Madame Palivez, mounted on her Zara, came galloping towards us. My heart saw her before my eyes, but for my very soul I could not have kept them from fixing on her.

It was Madame's custom to pass me without word or look of recognition; but now, before I had time to bethink or check myself, she slackened rein, stopped within a pace or two and saluted me with, "Good evening, Mr. La Touche," at the same time making a courteous bow to Helen. Never did the lady look more gay or graceful, the rich bloom of her cheek heightened by that evening gallop; the always bright intelligent eyes, the braids of shining hair, which had somehow broken band, and were falling loose and wavy under her riding hat, might have become Artemis returning from her most successful hunt. "Well met," she said, "and unexpectedly. I should have seen

you sooner, but have been much occupied. I shall be at home in the villa to-morrow evening ; come to me, for I have much to say."

"I will come, Madame." The words and the look had possessed me to such a degree that I forgot the woman who had been standing by my side—had been, but was not now ; Helen had returned Madame's bend, and moved away.

"Go and join your company," said the bank lady, looking kindly reproving ; "delicate, sensible girl, how quickly she got out of hearing ! Lucien, we will speak of her to-morrow. Good-bye !" She gave the reins a twich and galloped away to London.

I stood for a minute where she left me, a joyful but bewildered man, and then I recollected my duty to Miss Forbes, who was walking quickly home. In my haste to rectify matters, I ran up to her, offered my arm, and vowed she must come back to No. 9, and take tea with Rhoda and me.

"Oh no, thank you," said Helen, in a clear, high tone, at the same time drawing down her veil, but not before I saw there were tears in her eyes ; "we have not dined yet, and I am

expecting papa home: good-bye, Mr. La Touche, I should apologize to you as well as your sister for having spent so much of your time.”

She gave me her hand quickly, still holding her veil down. I stammered something about being always happy to spend time with her, and before I could get anything else gathered, she turned up the road at a pace I had never thought her capable of walking.

I stood and looked after till she was up the avenue and in at the gate, then I turned and gazed Londonward, where Madame Palivez had disappeared, and in my mind there was a strange turmoil of joy and sorrow, of hope and fear. I had seen the lady of my thoughts and bondage; she was not offended at the revelation I had dared to make at last, after so much holding back and hiding. She had bidden me come, and had much to say, I was bound to her service by heart and hand, I would be proud to do or suffer anything for her sake; oh, that all the bank were in ashes, and she no dependence in the world but me, that I might prove the truth and loyalty of my affection for herself alone!

But that brief interview had brought me a dis-

covery, one never dreamt of, though perhaps it should have been—the only daughter of Mr. Forbes, my family's best and only friend, the stay of their adversity, the help of their last remaining branches, to whom I owed everything, for their sakes and for my own; that man's only and well-beloved daughter had fixed her heart on me. I was not so vain, so heartless a man as to be proud of the conquest. I had not made it intentionally, and Helen had kept her secret well. Her worth was known to me, in spite of strict Presbyterianism and an overshadowed life, a plain face, and sober unattractive ways.

I had seen, and had sense enough to value her sterling qualities of heart and mind, and I never valued them more than at that moment, when a sudden flash, struck out by that accidental encounter, had enlightened me on the way her thoughts were going. I don't think I was naturally vain, a tough struggle with the world is apt to take that folly out of a man, and I had got a lesson not to be forgotten, in the case of Rosanna. The once deceived will not readily help to cheat themselves a second time, and the difference between Helen

Forbes and Rosanna Joyce was that between a saint and a milliner's girl. I did not deceive myself and I was not deceived; the light had flashed on me unsought and unexpected, and what was I to do? Give up Miss Forbes' society, avoid her father's house, get misinterpreted by the generous banker, appear to slight the friends who had stood by me and mine so long, or keep my own counsel, pretend to have learned nothing, and let the good, gentle, noble-hearted girl believe that it was so? On Helen's part I knew it could be done without difficulty; she was strong in that womanly pride, failing which there is no true delicacy. I might have gone on for ever visiting and conversing with her as a friend, and yet have no cause to think myself a preferred man. But on my side, whatever inexperienced people may think, the case was not so easy.

The man must be virtuous, wise, or cold beyond the common, who can know himself to be loved, and act as if he knew it not.

Henceforth I must be always on the defence of my own motives, always careful to prove that I was nothing but a friend; and what was worse, that would have to be proved to the

father as well as the daughter. By the light I had now, signs could be read that had formerly escaped me. The banker always looked pleased at seeing us together, had not spared his daughter's praises; they were every word true, I could have pledged my life on it, but there was the meaning of his advice against Madame Palivez, and adjurations to look out for a faithful, affectionate wife. In the world's eye, what a chance for a young clerk without prospects or connexions, a flourishing business to step into as son-in-law and heir, a highly respectable family to be connected with, and the girl herself—shame on me, that I did not rate her native worth above it all.

But my foolish heart, ay, and my foolish hopes, were gone after Madame Palivez; could it be that she loved me too? the thought made my brain spin round in the wildest of all dances. What was to be said to-morrow evening in the villa? she had accosted me on the public highway in the presence of a third party, and she was to speak of Helen; to what purpose? If those two women were rivals, all history and all satire were at fault, for none could speak

more nobly of each other. But I had to go home with my unspeakable discoveries and expectations, and live as best I could to the next evening.

CHAPTER VI.

KILLING NO MURDER.

How much of life is consumed in waiting, and there is no time harder to pass! It passes, nevertheless, as the intervening night and day passed with me, and in the sunset light I was at the villa gate, with the brass key and my golden hopes. It was the jessamine time again, the season at which I had been first admitted to her woodland retreat.

She must have loved that latest child of the summer, and heir of all its sweetness; verandah, window, and door were wreathed with its green tendrils and pale blossoms; all the air about was filled with its fragrance, and flower and odour yet bring back to me the lady of the villa as she looked when I saw her last in her summer rooms, white dress, and braided hair, with one

large white rose from her own garden twined in the shining bands.

I thought she had never seemed so glad to see me, never welcomed me so warmly, and there was something soft and tender in her look, unlike the queenly manner and high resolute spirit which marked her at all times above the mass of women.

“Sit down here, beside me, Lucien,” she said, “and give me your opinion on a subject which has somehow come into my thoughts this evening.”

I had never sat by her side till then, and to my bewitched brain it seemed like the first glimpse of Paradise; but she brought me back to the earth by saying, “Have you ever read the old book called ‘Killing no Murder?’”

“The pamphlet against Cromwell,” said I, “after the reading of which he is said never to have smiled again.”

“Any nonsense may be said, my friend,” and she smiled scornfully; “Cromwell was not the man to be so affected by anybody’s pamphlet; he knew all the Royalists could say before it was written; those who get and keep power as he did, are never sensitive to people’s sayings or

writings. But it was not of him or of the old book I was going to speak ; what is your opinion of the argument set forth in its title, are there not cases in which killing would be no murder ?” She was speaking calmly, and though rather surprised at her strain, I answered in the same manner. “ Yes, the laws of England, and, I believe of most nations, recognise justifiable homicide.”

“ I do not speak of laws, my friend—they always suit the interests or prejudices of their makers—but of abstract principle.”

“ The rule holds good in war, then,” said I.

“ Ay, and in life’s war,” she said, “ the long, long battle with evil and necessity, which we all wage from one generation to another, generally defeated, at best with only half victory, and always dear-bought. I am generalizing too widely, perhaps, having thought much on the subject, which probably you have not. Let us come to particulars then ; may not cases occur among the varieties of human misfortune, in which cutting the too tenacious thread of life would be the best and wisest thing for the dismissed, as well as for the dismitter ?”

“As in that of Virginius and his daughter?” said I.

“Yes, and in those of thousands more, pressed on and shut up from all chance of escape, by evils worse than the villanous Decemvir. You don't comprehend me; consider now, irrecoverable and irreparable misfortune of any kind sufficient to cut us off from our species, their pursuits, their hopes, and their sympathies. The like is not so uncommon, my friend; incurable disease, social degradation, the power of enemies, misplaced affections—if one be weak enough, though such are scarcely worth reckoning up, Lucien—would not the universal recognition of the principle we discuss save the world its hospitals of incurables, its lunatic asylums, its idiot wards, and all its other repositories of useless, stagnating, suffering life? would it not spare the cottage cretins, the unmentioned members of aristocratic families, ay, and the difficulties of royal ones? What suffering, what tyranny, what bringing down of our whole humanity, and scope for all that is vile and vulgar in it, would have been spared us too! There was a great and famous man of our own day, over one of whose transactions partisans have been busy

asserting and denying, ever since it was done, not to speak of the mighty coming out of moralists on either side, all because, as the general of an army obliged to retreat, and unable to take his sick and dying with him, he saved the unfortunate creatures from the inflictions of a cruel, fanatical enemy, by an easy and rapid poison. It was hundreds, says one partisan ; it was only some dozens, says another ; as if that had anything to do with the wrong or right of it. Right it was, Lucien, as the best and wisest course must always be, and the principle will hold good in private as well as in public life."

"I cannot agree with you, Madame." My senses were gathered by this time, and great as her power was over me, my moral convictions were not to be so argued down. "That principle of yours would leave no security, no value for human life ; it would give loose rein to the worst of human passions ; covetousness, selfishness of every kind, would turn it to large account. If the troublesome and useless were to be got rid of so easily, who would wait for landed property or money in the funds, when nothing but an old or imbecile life stood between it and them ? The

infanticide of Asia and the Pacific isles would be more than equalled in Europe; and suicide, under any circumstances, could be held no crime."

"Who said it was, my friend, except the slavish and cowardly creeds of these latter days, the worst and latest inventions of priests, whereby to get power and influence over men? That is what your boasted Christian faith has done for the world—I mean the world that received it; sapped its moral strength, and dwarfed its moral courage, by the weakest and most foolish of all fears—that of inevitable death; turning the Liberator and Rest Giver into the King of Terrors, and binding up the idea of him with churchyards and charnel-houses, out of which the sheeted ghost and the blood-sucking vampire came to make the wise and beautiful night, the time of thought, of sages, and of stars, terrible to rustics.

"The classic world, with its painted tombs and urns, knew nothing of them, nothing of the dread and shrinking which the thought of death brings to the Christian minds, supported by revelation, as they say. I do not speak of the Spartan going to sup with Pluto to the sound of

lyre and flute. The physical courage, the warlike element in man, is not easily subdued or sapped away till the decaying time of a race or system comes. Christianity found the Greek and Roman in that season ; history proves that it neither invigorated nor reclaimed them, for no creed can do so.

“ It was not it, but ages that civilized the Goth, the new doctrine enlisted his strength and his superstition when the northern gods were losing their sway, it may be because his migrations rolled too far from the polar circle of long nights and winters.

“ Yet, observe how little the classic Greek and the northern Viking feared to meet or think of the last enemy, and first if not only friend, Lucien, compared with the common habit and thought of Christian men. Nay, observe the believer in Brahma and Buddha. British officials in your Eastern colonies know well that capital punishments have little terror for the Hindoo and the Chinese, except when invested with peculiar horrors of cruelty or superstition.

“ Lucien, your security of human life has given priestcraft a fulcrum for his lever, which it has worked to the beating down of the

popular mind ; has filled the world with miserable impediments, as if its progress were not slow and sad enough, and I suppose will make yourself rue and regret that ever you made compact and friendship with me."

"Never, Madame," said I. "Cannot people differ in opinion on abstract subjects, and yet be friends?"

"Yes, Lucien, but abstract subjects sometimes take a concrete form, and come home to one's own experiences and necessities. We won't go farther for the present," she continued, hastily, as my lips opened to ask an explanation—"I know you have news for me which I have kept you all this time from telling. What is it, my friend, for I must try to think you so?"

I had no chance but to collect my scattered thoughts, and tell her all I knew or could remember of my Russian visitor. Ay, every word, of his discourse about the clerk she had in Dublin. It was not so hard to tell as one would imagine, after her own talk, and Madame listened calmly, as she did to all manner of strange and terrible things, her face growing

more and more composed as the tale went on, and making no remark till my disclosures were finished.

Then, she said in the same quiet manner, " He was an emissary from Prince Dashkoff, the gentleman you saw in the box with me at the theatre. His highness has been from home for some years; his estates, in the government of Archangel, I think, are heavily encumbered; his travelling expenses are considerable; he knows that I am the last of the Palivezi; he does not know that the house of Comenzoni are our heirs, and he has fixed his affections on the bank. That is my reading of the man and his views, easy enough to read, because shallow. There is no depth, beyond a French hazard table, and a Russian intrigue, which always means fibbing and cheating, in him. But he is a relation, I ought to say an affinity of my mother.

" She was of the house of Cuzenes, great people in the Crimea, and of old Greek descent; one of her aunts married into the Dashkoff family; the prince is that lady's grandson, a sort of cousin to me, and ten years younger than myself, though he does not look like it: hazard

tables and their accompaniments are apt to tell unfavourably on a man's appearance.

“The prince was no great beauty by nature neither was his mother; but she had a hundred times his capability: you will read of her in the books and memoirs of the time as confidante and chief help of Catherine the Second, in her desperate but successful game of getting rid of her husband and keeping his throne.

“I have heard the princess's maid (you observe I am given to gossip like other old women) tell how on the night of the great attempt her mistress sat alone in the best room of her palace with a pair of loaded pistols on the table before her, till a page came with the appointed signal that all was right, on which she discharged them successfully out of the back window, to nobody's damage, I believe, remarking, ‘It would have been through my own head if the Czarina's plan had miscarried; they should not have got me to send to Siberia.’

“Lucien, there was a woman of spirit, whatever else she might be; the princess was no relation of ours, remember, but a born Russian, the most capable race I know for deep plot and daring execution. These are their strong

points, and will give them the advantage of all the West in Europe's waning days, which seem to be coming. But to return to his highness: he is as well inclined to intrigue as his mother though not so able in it. He has been tampering with Esthers, or Esthers with him; I must take some measures with that winding, worming creature."

And her eyes flashed with a fierce and sudden lightning, which left the face cold and calm again. "He is a sort of relation not to be acknowledged, of course, but still related; only for that and for my father's promise to poor Uncle Alexis, he should not have been about the house so long, and now it is not worth while to make changes; but he must not be allowed to give trouble."

"Have you thought of what I mentioned in my note about Hannah Clark, Madame?" I said, for the subject occurred with a force I could not account for at the time.

"Oh, yes; you were perfectly correct; there is some intimacy between them, but the dumb girl is exactly the person least likely to do harm under his management, and I have desired Madame Oniga to see that she comes to no harm

herself, which is not likely either, for Hannah seems to have profited by her discreet discipline. Esthers has been talking nonsense to Prince Dashkoff, however, and the Prince has been fishing information out of him. Russian highnesses can condescend to anything when it suits their purpose; but the result is satisfactory on the whole; it proves how little the Jew knows, how little his sister could tell him, with all the noisy pretence she made.

“By the way, that crazed soul had all the courage of the family, the rest have only craft; and what an exhibition of both she made by following you or Cyprian all the way from the theatre, and getting behind the curtains in my boudoir! That was in the breaking-up time of her reason. Lucien, it is wonderful what the unhinged mind can effect against material obstacles; an evidence of latent and unnamed powers, perhaps; but always useless and ruinous to itself and others. Sally will never recover her senses; there is no restoration from that eclipse, though she may live long—twenty, thirty years, perhaps, in a lunatic asylum.”

Madame seemed to be talking to herself—her eyes were nearly closed, and at the last words

her whole frame shook with a sudden tremor ; but the next moment she looked up, collected and courageous as ever I saw her, and said, “ Lucien, would not that life be well cut short, and the burdened, fettered soul set free to seek its better fortune in another world ? ”

“ It would,” said I, “ if such were its Maker’s will.”

“ My friend, how are you and I to discover that ? ”

“ By the event, Madame, which should neither be brought about nor accelerated by human hands.”

I looked her calmly in the face, for the words were from my conscience, and they seemed to reach hers, for the first time in all our acquaintance her eyes drooped under my gaze ; she sat silent for a minute, as if revolving something hard and heavy in her mind, and then, with a sigh that seemed involuntary, said, “ We shall never see things in the same light, Lucien ; perhaps, it is not desirable for your sake that we should ; but you are a brave and honest man, and will stand by your word, and serve me as you promised—say you will, for there is no man I can trust but you.”

She stretched her hand to me, and it was

clasped in mine: had she commanded me to finish Sally Joyce, Esthers, and the entire family, my once own Rosanna included, I could not have refused at that moment.

Let no man boast of his strength till he has been fairly in the net; strong and wise men of old, Sampson and Solomon, were overcome by woman's wiles, and I am mistaken if the best or worst of their Delilahs would have been a match for Madame Palivez.

I know not now in what words I pledged myself over and over again to her service and commands; but as I spoke the woman's look grew sad and softened, I felt her hand sliding away from mine, and dared not retain it; she was queen and empress over me to the last; and then, as if determined to change the subject, said, "Lucien, don't mind that Baltic merchant of yours; if he come again, hear what he has been bidden to say. I will take measures with Esthers for so buzzing up his silly highness; if he were not a connexion of my mother, I should take no trouble with the man. You have never heard me speak of her before; she died long ago, in the year they sent me to be educated in that Greek convent beside the Euxine; but I

remember her well, and have her portrait among the ladies of our house—they were always taken in miniature; the men are at full length yonder on the walls of the bank, but no woman of the family was ever so painted, except the Kazan princess, whom you have seen and must remember. My mother was not like her, but a fine Greek face, not so beautiful as regular, which became her character, for she was a respectable, Greek lady of the old school, whose domestic manners had survived the vicissitudes of creed and empire, and undergone little alteration from the days of Penelope to my mother's youth. Like the Queen of Ithaca, she spun with a distaff, wove on the hand-loom, embroidered skilfully with her needle, superintended all her household affairs, was not to be seen by strangers, went out only on church festivals or visits of ceremony, and always deeply veiled, as matrons of rank and propriety were among the ancient Greeks, and still are in their northern colonies. I will show you her picture, Lucien, and, notwithstanding the classic regularity of features, which makes some difference, do you know whom she resembles? The lady from whom I was sorry to be your cause of parting,

yesterday evening ; tell me, why did you leave her so abruptly ?”

“ We had only met by accident, Madame, and Miss Forbes was going home.”

“ She seemed in no haste about it, Lucien, and neither did you, till I came forward. You were talking in the most friendly and confidential manner ; so you should, my friend, and I was glad to see it.

“ Do you know that I made a discovery that hour on the Bayswater-road, one which you should never hear of if I did not think you wiser and better than common men ; Lucien, that virtuous, pious, gentle woman loves you with all the strength and truth of her pure and constant nature. There is a treasure come to your hand, ay, and to your heart, if you have wisdom and worth enough to value it, which great and good men have not been blessed with. ‘ He that a good woman loves is fenced against all evil,’ says the Tuscan proverb.

“ Helen Forbes is a good woman, if there be one on this side of the blue. She is her father’s heiress, but we will not speak of that ; I know you are not the man to be bribed or bought in marriage. But her tender and true affection

will complete for you the golden round of life, broken and fragmentary to so many. Your domestic comfort, your worldly credit, your family affairs, will be safe in her keeping; and, more than all, she loves you, Lucien; the man is worse than a fool with whom that counts for little."

"Madame," said I, the whole man within me rising against being so made over and disposed of, "I know Miss Forbes deserves all the praise you give her, but were she ten times as good and as worthy I cannot love her, having loved another. What I ventured to tell you at our last meeting was true, whatever you may please to reckon it; I spoke in haste, and sore pressed by the feelings of the hour. If it were displeasing to you, as I suppose, forgive me for the sake of the circumstances, but I cannot forget that it was uttered, and that it was true."

"No, Lucien, it was not, it could not be," and she wrung her hands with a look of hopeless misery, "there are twenty years between us, my friend; I knew the mysteries of life before you were born. Yes, it is true, I look younger than my years; and there are barriers far more impassable than the disparity of age."

"Our different positions?" said I.

“No, these are outward chances which my choice could step over, would have stepped, perhaps, whatever the world might count it.”

It was a vague, foolish hope waking up in my heart that made me clasp her hand between my own, which were trembling like aspen leaves.

“Yes, Lucien,” she was calm and collected now, and the words came soft and slowly, “there is something in my own mind, something in yours, something in the fate or chance which brought us to be acquainted, which tells me we were not born strangers. Maybe it was in the former life that we knew each other. Yes, my friend, there was an existence before this for some of us ; don’t you dream at times of places and things you never saw ?

“There may be many lives with the Lethe between them ; perhaps it is in one to come that we are to meet again ; I know there are such predestinations ; but on this side of the churchyard clay, Lucien, there can be nothing but friendship between you and I. Don’t look so vexed ; no life can have in it anything nobler or more worthy of the soul than friendship ; it survives all chances, it outlasts all changes. I am speaking of the true, immortal sort, and if

that link of eternity be between us, we will come together in spite of time and space. I cannot prove, but I believe it, and I believe in you as I never did before.

“Don’t ask me why; the truths that most concern us are revealed by flashes; I know now you are the one friend my weakness or my faith has sought for among all that ever passed me on life’s highway—what a weary, dusty, obstructed one it is—the friend that will open the gates of death for me, and send my soul free and unburdened to the heritage that has no mortgage to the powers of darkness and evil on it.”

“Kill you!” said I, starting up, and my own voice sounded strange and hollow. “Madame, whatever you may have made me promise, I will never do that.”

“You will, Lucien, my first, my only friend; you will do more for me than Virginius did for his daughter, for I have a greater evil to escape from, and no blame of the foolish world will fall on you, no danger from its laws.”

She held out her hand to me, but I could not take it, though never had she looked more kind and tender.

“What do you mean, Madame? For God’s sake tell me what put such a thought in your mind!”

“A fact in my family history with which you are not acquainted, Lucien; sit down and listen to me; you are the first man, not a Palivez, to whom it was ever told, and I know you will keep your promise.”

I sat down mechanically, but not now so close by her side, and she proceeded with the firm look and tone of one who had wound herself up to the task, and would fulfil it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HISTORY OF THE PALIVEZI, AND THEIR
DOOM.

“MY family was reckoned old and illustrious among the Greeks settled in Southern Russia, that corner of ancient Scythia, to which Greece sent out her earliest colonies, the meeting-place of Europe’s old civilisation and most ancient barbarism, where the creeds and customs of East and West still flourish side by side, and their races have dwelt for ages without mingling. We were not sprung from the early colonists, but of the Attic stock ; Archons of Athens were among our ancestors ; but, like many of the Greek patricians, we removed to Byzantium, when Constantine the Great made it his capital and founded the Eastern Empire.

“Ages after, when the Ottoman Turks were becoming known on the Greek frontiers, and the Russians of the North were catching the lights of civilisation and Christianity from Constantinople, a dispute with the Patriarch which began about Church dues, and ended in an accusation of worshipping Jupiter, made us emigrate first to the flourishing city of Novgorod, and afterwards to Kief, still the holy place of the North, and then chosen by Saint Vladimir as the capital of his new-christened kingdom.

“From that period the Palivezi lived and traded among the Greeks of Russia. Always of patrician rank and good estate, they had become merchants and bankers as early as the Roman times; the Greek nobility gave example in this respect to those of Venice and other Italian cities. They carried their business with them to the North; Novgorod and Kief were the emporiums of European and Asiatic commerce; from the tenth to the fifteenth century, the Greeks monopolised its higher and more profitable branches, and the Palivezi were the most successful house among them. In spite of intestine wars and Tartar

invasions, which often passed over the land in those five hundred years, their mercantile prudence, enterprise, and honour—which, by the way, were equally proverbial—enabled them to gather and keep riches which no other firm in the North could boast. It was their wisdom and it proved their strength.

“Lucien, whatever philosophers may say, wealth is worth striving for; it is the one power which commands all material things, and, to some extent, the minds of men; yet it may be over-prized and over-paid, as happened in our house.

“The Palivezi had acquired a very great influence and authority on the banks of the Borysthenes, through their credit in foreign lands, and the capital they could command at home. They had made the northern princes their humble servants, through loans and subsidies; they had raised troops to defend the cities where they dwelt, against the Tartar; some of them had commanded their armed companies and done the invader no small damage. When at length the northern torrent overwhelmed the land, they bribed

barbarian prejudices, bought over favourites, and thus obtained good terms from the Tartar chiefs, with whom they treated on their own account as independent powers. They had similar dealings, warlike and pacific, with the Poles and the Teutonic knights ; in short, with all the conquerors and troublers of those times.

“But Russia struggled back into national life. Vasilrewitsch shook off the Tartar domination, and built the Kremlin at Moscow, the cross was established in the north, and the crescent waned before it step by step, and year by year, till in the days of Ivan, called by his own subjects the Terrible, and known in England as the Muscovite Czar who sent ambassadors to Queen Elizabeth, and allowed her subjects to form a trading company at Archangel, the kingdoms of Crimea and Kazan, to which his ancestors had paid tribute, were conquered and reduced to Russian rule, the whole South and East, as far as the frontiers of Poland and the Euxine Sea, became his dominions, and the Palivezi had to deal with an absolute and Christian Czar.

“They lent him money, as they had done

to his predecessors ; they bought over his ministers and favourites—for the terrible Ivan had some such—but Christian Russians were more expensive to bribe and buy than Mahometan Tartars. The conquering Czar could not be so well secured by loans as his tribute-paying ancestors had been ; it was requisite to please and serve him too, if they would live and trade within his bounds, and about this time Ivan required a piece of special service.

“ He had conquered the kingdom of Kazan ; internal feuds and the chances of war and time had exterminated its royal house all to one old man, trembling on the verge of the grave, and his daughter, the last but undoubted heiress of the Tartar line. It was true that women counted for little among the Eastern and Moslem races, but the blood of Zingus was in her veins ; the Tartar chief who happened to marry her might claim the sovereignty of Kazan, in her right, and Ivan was determined to secure it to his posterity. The antipathies of race and religion were stronger in those days than they are now among the Russians. The absolute Czar,

though he might set up wheels and gibbets for them, could not ask one of his Muscovite nobles to marry the Tartar princess, with any amount of dowry; but the head of the Greek banking house had an only son and heir yet undisposed of in marriage, and Ivan fixed on him as a safe husband for the dangerous heiress.

“Refusal involved a flight from Russia, without time to arrange business or gather in debts and securities, and the confiscation of all that could not be carried off was certain. Compliance secured the monopoly of Eastern commerce, which was now ebbing fast away from Novgorod and Kief, having found new channels in the Levant and the Adriatic. The Palivezi might engross all that remained; might retain their wealth and influence, if not rise to greater, by obeying the Czar’s behest; and as there was no alternative but ruin, these considerations prevailed. The Greek line which had kept its pure Hellenic descent unbroken and unmingled with any foreign strain from the days of Athenian liberty, was linked to the Scythian hordes, and Eusibius Palivez married the last des-

cendant of Zingus Khan. You see her picture hanging in my private rooms, beside the veiled Nemesis, a true Tartar face in its ugliness, in its strength, and in the power of the curse with which she smote my family.

“Now, Lucien, I am about to tell you one of those traditions which dignified historians ignore, and sensible biographers reason away, but which are nevertheless the truest part of national or family history. Yermiska, that was the Tartar name of the princess, though they baptized her Helena, in the newly-erected church dedicated to that saint in Kazan, had formed an early attachment to a Calmuck chief, who had fought gallantly for his share of the Crimea, retired with his tribe before the advancing Russians, far eastward, and was said to have ultimately settled on the frontiers of China. His descent was held inferior to her own; I believe the tribe were not orthodox Mahometans either; but there was a vow between them, and Yermiska would fain have retired eastward, too. But, the old chief, her father, would not leave the soil of Kazan and the stone coffins of his ancestors.

“For the sake of remaining there, he consented to her marriage with the Christian trader; the conquering Czar commanded it; the Palivezi, father and son—though solemnly warned of the bride’s aversion, by her old confidential nurse, secretly sent to their house under shade of night—held on to the wedding which promised such advantages.

“Yermiska was a Tartar Moslema, accustomed to think of revenge, but never of revolt or disobedience; and the night before her marriage she deliberately drank a potion, prepared for her by a Calmuck sorceress, famous throughout the north, and known to journey as far as Khamtschatka in her search for plants of power. How, or of what that draught was compounded, the Powers of Darkness best know; but the Princess declared, and time has proved her statement true, that it would transmit hereditary and irremediable madness to the utmost generation of her descendants.

“You look incredulous, my friend. There are secrets in nature for which the boasted science of Europe has neither name nor place. Among the rank-growing weeds of her fens and marshes, among the wind-sown flowers of her

woods and wilds, there are plants that draw occult influences down from the midnight moon, or up from the nether kingdom, to mingle with their juices, and furnish the skilful searcher with weapons against life and death, never yet matched by your chemists and anatomists. They were known three thousand years ago to necromancers, who sought them out on the plains of Thessaly and the vales of Etruria. Through them they changed men's natures and turned the course of their affections; the love philtres were not all fancies, neither were the tales of Caligula and Domitian.

“From them the Egyptian embalmers drew the gums which fenced their dead against decay, while it fell on successive creeds and dynasties. That knowledge, like all the deeper and higher sorts, has no written records. It cannot be found in books; they contain but the husks and rinds of learning, being meant for the common eye and mind. It exists, nevertheless, among primitive and unlettered races; the African slave and the Hindoo pariah have visited the sins of the fathers upon the Anglo-Saxon families by means similar to those which the unwilling bride employed against mine.

“Strange that such mysterious drugs should be far less powerful to save than to destroy; as it is thought because the plants that bear them grow so near the dead, for the graves of earth’s first inhabitants are in her wastes and wilds. You cannot believe it—the subject is too new to you; we will talk of it hereafter, if there be time; but the night wears, and I must proceed with my weary tale.

“Eusebius Palivez, one of the handsomest men of his time, and one of the wealthiest in Russia, though never able to supersede the Calmuck chief, espoused his Tartar bride, with a pomp which astonished all Kazan, in the church where she had been baptized on the previous day, brought her home to his house in Kief, with splendour and festivity befitting a wealthy Greek of the sixteenth century, and was henceforth established in the favour of the terrible Czar, and in the monopoly of Eastern trade and banking.

“The Princess Helena, as people continued to call her, behaved like a dutiful and prudent wife—though she insisted on having her tirema, or harem apartments, kept strictly separate from the public rooms—wore a thicker veil than

Greek ladies were accustomed to, and never went to church if she could help it. There was great peace, if nothing better, between her and her husband for full thirty years.

“They had three sons and two daughters; the house of Palivez had increased in riches as well as in numbers, when the great plague, which devastated Eastern Europe at the end of the sixteenth century, found its way to Kief, entered their walls in spite of wealth and care, and first lighted on the Princess Helena. The Tartar woman was dying, and she knew it.

“In the middle of the third night, a band of Greek monks stood round her bed; they had come to administer the last sacraments, and see the soul won from Mahomet safe on its last journey; her husband and children stood at the chamber-door—they could venture no nearer the pestilence, though the black cross marked the door, and none might pass out or in. But the daughter of Zingus raised herself with a final effort, looked Eusebius Palivez in the face, and told him, in a tone which all the house could hear, what she had done for him and his posterity the night before her marriage; prayed that the Prophet, in whom her fathers trusted,

might hold the curse over them to their latest generation, struck the Eucharist out of the hand of a horrified monk, and, with a shout of fierce laughter, fell back and died.

“Eusebius Palivez lived to see his hundred and fifth birth-day. He also lived to see the fearful intelligence of that midnight prove true; his eldest son, about the age of fifty, fell, as all the Palivez have, or would have fallen, into strange and hopeless insanity. Up to that time he had been a man of clear intellects, sober, honest habits, and more than common understanding.

“There was no cause of accident or disease the doctors could discover for his madness. It began with an unaccountable loss of memory; Lucien, I hold that faculty to be the hinge on which both life and mind turn. Well, it went from him, as it were, piecemeal, for about six months; and then furious, raging frenzy was suddenly developed.

“I have heard that he killed three keepers within the first year; and the part of the house where they kept him had to be walled up, to prevent his getting out and destroying the entire family. After about seven years of that frantic

state, he gradually sank into imbecility, so grovelling and degraded that the details could only produce disgust.

“ I have heard them all, for this was the first case and example of our family misfortune ; henceforth it was the sure inheritance of every succeeding Palivez, man or woman—somewhat modified in the latter, but the same in character and duration ; for both there was no recovery—no interval ; and it always came on at middle age, sooner or later, according to constitution, but never deferred beyond the fiftieth year. You will say it was hereditary in the Princess’s Tartar family, derived, as it was, from barbarous warriors, whose lives had been full of wild excitement, and probably wilder excess.

“ That would be a probable and sensible explanation ; but I believe in the account handed down to us from Eusebius, her unlucky husband, and my unlucky ancestor. He left a doom hanging over every Palivez, which prudence could not ward off, or wealth bribe away—coming nearer to them year by year, as they grew out of youth into the business and importance of rich and wise men of the world ; but there was brave blood among them.

“That wild, fierce stream from the Scythian deserts had met and mingled with that which dyed the sea at Salamis, and made it famous to all time. The Palivez had not the wisdom to foil the Fates by letting the doomed race die out, and others take their place among the world’s gainers and gatherers; but they had the courage, man after man, to follow the precept and example of the Tartar woman’s youngest son.

“His name was Eusebius, too—a notable name in our family; it was given to the first that turned Christian, but the priest strongly suspected this Eusebius of Paganism; some of us were always relapsing that way, you perceive. He saw there was but one escape for our family honour—one mode of concealing our misfortune from the knowledge of the vulgar—and of what misfortune will they not take advantage in one form or other? Ours was grievous beyond the common, and would bring more than common scorn and shame.

“Lucien, if you are not well enough acquainted with the world to know that that is all our ill luck, however unmerited, brings us from the common herd—and what else are mankind?

—you may come to learn it in time. Were the heads of our high-born and stainless house to become proverbial as foredoomed madmen? were our stately mansions, to which cities looked for the tokens of their prosperity, and princes came as humble negotiators, to contain walled-up prisons for raving frenzy, or imbecility sunk far below the level of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment? were useless and wretched lives to wear and suffer on with no result but the impediment of business, and the dishonour of our name? Eusebius found a wiser course, and all his descendants have followed it, from one generation to another.

“The inscrutable doom was made known, at fitting time and to the proper person—that is to say, to the nearest heir and evident successor; the duty was bound upon them, and accepted, without one cowardly defaulter, as the time approached and the symptoms became manifest, to remove beyond the bounds of suffering and insanity the man whose days of usefulness and reason were numbered.

“Heir after heir fulfilled that duty to his predecessor, by a sure and rapid poison, compounded for us by one of the same Tartar race

to whom its necessity was owing. Some had courage and judgment enough to act for themselves, some died before the time of the visitation. The daughters of our house were generally sent to convents; the few that were married in Russia brought only suspicion on the family through their misfortune; its cause and consequence were never revealed to them.

“Being Greeks, and men of Eastern business, the Palivezi held women incapable of keeping such a secret—for a secret it was kept within our walls and breasts, at furthest known only to some ancient and trusty servant, like my old Marco, some aged confessor, or discreet abbess. To make its keeping safer, and also to keep the wealth it had gathered from the needy hands of Ivan’s successors, our house removed to Amsterdam.

“The rapidly-rising commerce of that city, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, made it an eligible position for Eastern bankers; and in the grasping, feverish haste of trade, there are covert and shelter for all who have matters to conceal. People have less time or interest to waste in observation of their neighbours’ lives and doings. In Amsterdam we remained, and

flourished, and left our dead—a Greek house of great business, great repute, and singularly-secluded habits, for nearly a hundred years.

“Then the flush of Dutch commerce passed away, leaving the country more quiet and leisure for gossip and remark. We had formed English connexions; the reigning head of our house thought it expedient to become a stranger once more; there was no Greek firm in Dublin, and we had reason to expect special favour at the viceregal court. To Dublin we and our bank removed accordingly; it was in my great-grandfather’s time. There the one Palivezi succeeded the other, and did the ancient office of heir and successor, which has been transmitted through ten generations, till the line has come to its end in me. My father did that duty to his elder brother, Alexis; and I did the same for him eighteen years ago.

“You start, my friend; but I lived in the expectation of it for years before, and have lived in its memory ever since. None but my old servants and you know the fact; you watched with me through the last anniversary night; you are the only friend I ever had, or could have, since then; and you will do the same office for me.

“Perhaps you will despise me. I have despised myself many a time for the weakness which makes me shrink from doing on my own behalf that which I did for my dear and loving father. I have reasoned, striven and sneered against it, but all in vain. The shrinking and the horror remain with me; yet, do me justice, Lucien, it is not want of courage to open the gate of death with my own hand, and walk into its outer darkness. But I mistrust my own firmness of nerve; my own clearness of judgment when the time arrives. Perhaps it is weak not to anticipate its coming, and be beforehand with it; but, like all doomed people, I value the days of respite, and am not willing to part with one of them. If life had been less full of health and vigour, I might have been more willing to cut it short.

“Yet, once more, do not mistake me; with such a doom hanging over it, I am willing to rise and go when the time approaches. That must be soon, and I well know it; but you, my friend, you whom the very Fates brought to me in spite of strangership and distrust; you who have saved my life when it was worth saving; who have heard my secret thoughts; who have

reasoned with and against me, and learned from my lips the tale never before heard but by a Palivez—you will not allow me to fall into that horrible ruin, but do me the greatest and the only service that man can do. It was my father's prophecy that I, the last of his house, would find a friendly hand to requite my obedience to his last wishes.

“Oh! Lucien, but that was hard, not to do, but to think of, when he first told me. I was young then, and had come home from the Greek convent, where I was educated. The daughters of our family had been educated and received as nuns there from the days of Ivan. Our ancestor Eusebius, the same who married to please the Czar, had liberally endowed it for that purpose, and in my time the abbess was one of the Comneni of Trebizond, and one of the best scholars in the North.

“To her I owe my Greek and Latin, perhaps my free thinking too, for she was strong and free of thought, though an abbess. She knew our family secret, and in a manner prepared me for it; not the whole, remember, that was not confided even to our trusty friends in the convents. They knew who had been inmates of

of their back and out-of-the-way rooms from one generation to another ; they knew that none of the rich banking Palivezi lived to old age, but they knew no more. Well, the abbess had taught me to think ; maybe I had a natural turn for that uncommon process.

“ There was a grand-aunt of mine living, if I can call it so, in one of the back cloisters, and a vault for the ladies of our family under the chapel. My father told me the rest when I came home. He had loved me well, Lucien. I was the only child he ever had ; the heiress of his wealth and his misfortune. There was something in our characters too, which drew us closer to each other, in spite of the difference of sex and years, in spite of our different bents of mind, for he was a firm believer in the Christian faith, and I have no worship except for the ancient gods of my race.

“ You look astonished, my friend ; is it so wonderful that the faith of ages and nations, as far as history casts back her lights, believed in the bravest, the wisest, the most famous times of the world, should yet remain among mankind ? I tell you the Pagans did not all die out with Julian the philosopher, whom you call the

Apostate, or with those latest worshippers of Pan in remote woodland villages, from whom the superseded system took its name. Patriarchs of the Greek Church, and cardinals of Rome—wise men who chanced to be kings or chiefs in Christendom, scholars and poets, in the depths of their unwritten thoughts, have recognised in the ever-living, ever-active powers of Nature, the only possible and obvious divinities.

“You cannot receive the doctrine? Well, my friend, we will not dispute upon it. I have the liberality as well as the faith of my Athenian ancestors, who erected an altar to the unknown God; but to return to my father. He loved me well, and he trusted me as man rarely does or can trust in woman. He knew my mind was not of the inferior order, though I had the misfortune to be born a daughter and not a son, and when, after my uncle’s departure, he took to prayers and penances—that was his mode of reconciling himself with our terrible necessity.

“All the Palivezi who were Christians had taken the same method. He confided his business, his mercantile credit, and of course, family honour to me, and bound me by the love I bore

and the obedience I owed him, to see that the misery and degradation of madness should not fall on his life. I did it, Lucien ; and you will do the same for me. It was the service I asked and you promised. By your honour as an Irish gentleman, by your faith as a friend, by the love which I believe you bear me, and which, if it prove true and lasting, will bring us together under happier auspices in some other planet, I charge you to give me the poison within an hour after you first perceive that my intellects are shaken. It is the surest, safest, only way—and, Lucien, you will do it?”

She held out her hand to me, and I clasped it between my own. It was cold as ice, and we sat for some minutes without speaking.

Her tale had been told so calmly, so clearly, that there was no question for me to ask, no doubt for me to offer. Strange as it was, I felt that it was a true though terrible explanation of all that had puzzled and perplexed me concerning her, and I think that while we sat there with clasped hands I learned something of what people mean by a broken heart. Mine did not break, I suppose. I have lived long since then ; had my share of human cares, hopes, and enjoy-

ments ; but there are times of shipwreck and ruin to the man within, which after-time may cover with new soil and sow with other harvests, as corn grows over battlefields and garden flowers on graves ; yet the ruin and the wreck are there, and tokens of them will turn up at times to sight and memory.

I sat there bowed down and crushed by the great burden her strange misfortunes had laid on me. Doubtless it was my sin or my infatuation—I have thought of it over and over, but cannot settle which—that made me see no other possible course than to do her bidding, and repeat my promise now that the required service was set clearly before me ; and she looked me in the face with those earnest, hopeless, yet confiding eyes of hers, and said—“ Lucien, you will do it ? You will save me ; say you will, and set my mind at rest, for the time is short. Let me know that I can depend on you, and pass the days as easily as I can.”

“ Madame, if nothing else can be done for you, I will do it.”

“ If nothing else, Lucien ! I will not have that *if*. I tell you there is nothing possible. Would all my forefathers have done as they did

for brothers and for parents?—the Palivez were an attached and faithful family, never one of their elders tyrannical or stingy to the young, nor one of the young anxious to get their seniors' places—would all my female relations in households or in convents, if they happened to live long enough, have fallen into the same horror? Ay, Lucien, and our irregular branches—the Palivezi had not many of them, but such things will occur, witness my uncle's children by the Jewess—our misfortune had descended to them, though in an irregular manner.

“Strange that the same thing should have happened to similar offshoots in all our generations. Esthers' elder brother, the man from whose knife you saved me, has been shut up and under keepers for the last fifteen years. I need scarcely tell you that he had made his escape from an asylum at the time, and was restored to it. Esthers himself is peculiar, but I think will not lose his reason, such as it is; and his sister Sally, there is reason for believing—she is my uncle's child, too—has gone into the eclipse, as you saw, and will never come out of it.

“Our family heritage and their mother's in-

temperance have worked strangely on them. I don't know which influence it was that endowed them one and all with such a strong inclination and singular power to penetrate into other people's concerns, but that characterised every one of them. Poor Reuben, the eldest brother, guessed through it, or through his own share in our misfortune—these things cast true though distorted lights on life and its mysteries—that I had some hand in shortening somebody's days. That was all that could be made out from his ravings. Sally heard them, for she could not be kept from visiting him, and began to rave in her turn. Now you know all, my friend; you have promised to serve me, and I will live and die your debtor."

She clasped my hand. Her fingers were growing warm again. Her look was that of one relieved and positively satisfied. I had promised and may it be forgiven me, determined to keep my word, with an additional resolution to take share of the sure and rapid poison, for well I knew that living afterwards would have been impossible. I did not tell her that, but she sat close by me, promised to put the phial into my hands—it was always kept among her

jewellery, hermetically sealed, and in a gold case.

“It passes for a reliquary. I am not sure they don’t think we have a chip of the true cross in it,” she said, with a scornful smile.

“Why should they not? it is the chief relic in our family, and has been of more genuine service than ever holy chip or bone was, even to the priests.”

She told me other particulars. How long the poison could be kept strong and able to do its work—half a century and more. Two generations of the Palivezi had been served from the same phial. The secret of its manufacture descended in a line of Tartar peasants of the Calmuck race, and living in their ancient seats on the borders of the Crimea. The present representative had replenished her reliquary on her last visit to Russia. There was no danger that the mixture was not strong enough.

“You will take charge of it, and see me every day, in the bank or out of it, no matter where. My look and manner will tell you when the time has come. I think I shall be able to tell you myself; and Lucien, by our after-meeting, be true to me in this matter; but I know

your honour—the only genuine article of the kind I ever met with since my father left me—you will be faithful?” I promised once more, and saw the summer daylight creeping in upon us.

“The morning is come,” she said, “how many mornings have I yet to see? Oh! Lucien, it is sometimes hard to think of leaving the night and day; the seasons and the sky. I know I shall come to them again, this is not the end of my life; but there is a Lethe-time between which I cannot understand. It is that which gave rise to all the untenable dogmas from transmigration to purgatory. You do not talk, my friend, and I grow weary. It may seem selfish, but now that you know everything, and have pledged yourself to me, I feel at rest and willing to go there.

“Sleep is stealing over me; it often does so at the dawn of day, however one holds out through the night, and many a night have I been sleepless. By the way, there was a divining dervish, when I was last in Thessaly, who told me I should die in the night and by steel, but I think he was mistaken. Will you bid me good morning? Kiss me, too, my friend, and don’t

forget to see me every day till we part ; come at what hour you will. I will take no more trouble about the world's thoughts or sayings, my time is too short ; only I must take care that you are not compromised with its laws and customs. But we will talk of that again."

I kissed and left her ; walked home through the whitening day, opened my own door, and heard a sound, which I knew to be Rhoda retiring to her own room, so as not to seem anxious and watching for me. What trouble and concern I had been to that kindly sister ! the vague fears and surmises which I had so often laughed and argued down, had banished rest and sleep from her all that night, whilst her worst forebodings were being fulfilled in a manner she could not guess at, and must never know. I had been little company and less comfort to her. Well, she would miss me the less when all was over and she and Melrose Morton were happily settled in Scotland. I had shrunk from that prospect once, because of the solitude it must bring me ; but now it was all my conscience had to rest on regarding Rhoda, and I felt there were worse things in life than being alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

RHODA IS ASKED IN MARRIAGE.

THERE are old legendary tales of men being so changed by extraordinary sights or adventures that they were never the same again, and something of the kind seemed to have passed over me in the course of that night talked away among the jessamine. Between the setting and the rising of the sun my whole world had altered—the hopes, the feelings that went with me to the villa did not come back with me to my own small house and chamber, where I laid myself down, worn out in mind and body, and dreamt the night's talk over again, till the summer sun flashing on my eyes woke me up to the life and business of the day.

They had not changed the outside of things ;

but my world within was no more what it had been. I loved Madame Palivez still, and was bound to her service by will as by promise ; but what a service it was now the tale was told, and the prospect made clear ! However improbable her family secret may seem to those that read my record, I believed it then, and I believe it still.

The thought and experience of after years have convinced me of the truth of her remark —“there are secrets in nature for which the boasted science of Europe has neither name nor place.”

I do not undertake to endorse, much less explain, all her statements on the subject ; but I tell the tale as it was told to me, and whatever may have been the cause, the dreadful effects were known to be inevitable, and I was pledged to be the instrument of her escape. The discovery had opened my eyes to our true positions. As fairy delusions were said to fade and change before the disenchanted sight, so all things about her and my acquaintance with her took a different and a ghastly aspect.

The beauty that had charmed me was still there ; but I knew the doom that hung over it.

The rosy lips which mine had touched, for the first and last time as it proved, the bright eyes and shining hair, were bound for the clay. The wealth and fashion had a background of the churchyard and the grave.

It was true that all lives were so bounded; but here the sword was seen suspended over the banquet board, and I had the hair to cut. She must have seen it herself for many a year, and to this hour I can neither comprehend nor sufficiently admire the innate strength and courage that made her bear the sight so bravely, and bloom so brightly under it.

My own part in it made me feel myself a doomed man—the cares, the business, the obligations of life lost their value and their hold upon me. What matter about work or provision, repute or appearances, when six months might settle it all?

My resolution was taken, and would be kept; may it be passed over among the sins of that desperate time, for my soul had lost its anchor and was drifting away in the storm! I got careless of everything. The Forbes' troubles and friendship, Melrose Morton's brotherly affection, even my sister's love and care for me;

and as for the world's thoughts and sayings, they would have passed me like its wind and dust.

I went to the private rooms, and I went to the villa to see her every day, as she had pledged me to do; her presence was still my fairy land, and she Queen Gloriana. Though the flowers had become churchyard grass, the gay dress a shroud, and the gold a coffin-plate, the woman had charms which no discovery, no fate could alter—those of mind and manner.

Her wit, her wisdom, her lively brilliant fancy, and free, fearless thought, had greater power over me than ever, now that all her outward advantages seemed submerged in the coming doom. They brought the conviction and reality of an after-life upon me at times, as prayer or sermon had never done; yet not with a consolatory or purifying force.

I was desperate and dissatisfied, too, even with her; it might be her character was beyond my measurement, for I could never understand how it was that after she had made her revelation, and cast, as it were, half of the doom on me, her mind seemed at ease, her spirits

more equal and higher than I used to find them.

The pleasures and advantages of her position seemed to be enjoyed with greater zest, though in a private manner, for she stayed more at home, and took to art and literature rather than company. I was always received with smiles and welcomes, expected to share her gaiety and enter into her enjoyments.

We were friends nearer and more intimate than we had ever been before; but there was nothing beyond friendship permitted or even dreamt of. For all her talk about our coming together in some distant planet, the woman showed no signs of caring for me as a man; that parting kiss when her fearful tale was told was the only familiarity that ever passed between us, and though she had concluded to trouble herself no more about what people said or thought, Madame Palivez kept her state and ceremony as high as ever.

The door from the Greek churchyard was still my enjoined mode of entrance to her residence behind the bank; Calixi waited for and showed me up to another room when she was occupied with friends or clients, and at

the villa there was never anybody but ourselves.

We did not happen to meet in public; if we had, I am not sure she would not have passed me without recognition as formerly. In short, I thought and fretted under it then, and an after review of all the circumstances has led me to the conclusion that the last of the Palivez having always looked on mankind as subjects to be employed and made use of, had included me, perhaps unconsciously, in the general estimate, preferred only because fit for a special purpose.

It may be I wrong her memory, for the case was hard; but looking back on the time, I can understand the hardened recklessness of men in plague-struck cities or desperate campaigns, and see how much I owe to a preserving Providence that did not send temptations in my way, for I was hopeless and graceless enough for anything.

The summer waned, and the autumn was wearing away in this fashion. Nobody guessed my state of mind; nobody ever guesses at anything so bad. It is probable that my walk and conversation were sober and steady as

they had ever been ; but I was conscious, while doing my work strictly in the bank, of showing something like a general care for nobody, and Esthers appeared to know that I was less to be trifled with than ever.

The manager kept well from me, and I was as willing to dispense with his company. I knew now the cause of his reminding likeness to the ragged man with the knife, and why my chance saying, "I hope it won't happen to you, Mr. Esthers," had frightened him off in Bolton-row. That he knew of my more frequent visits to Madame, that he hated me more in consequence, I could not doubt ; Esthers, as usual, gave no sign, but he was busy about it, nevertheless.

There was another that observed my ways and doings, but with different eyes. Rhoda had learned, by long practice and strange experience, poor girl, to take note of, and wonder in silence at what she might have called the carryings-on of her genteel brother.

She had been watching for my home-coming that night, but did not intend me to know ; she had never referred to my long absence, never asked a question or insinuated her surprise, and

over-occupied with my thoughts, I imagined it had slipped out of her memory ; had she not Melrose Morton to think of? That was the only satisfactory point in all my outlooks.

Melrose had got his uncle's will settled, realized his legacy, parted company with the lawyers, but still remained in Bloomsbury, and came to No. 9 more frequently than ever. I did not wonder what his intentions were, for I knew that with Melrose they were sure to be honourable ; but I would like to hear the question formally asked regarding my fraternal approbation, of which Melrose must have been pretty sure, too, and see the courtship brought to a happy conclusion before my own terrible adventure came on.

It therefore pleased me to find Morton at home one evening before me, seated with Rhoda in our little parlour, then lit up with the first winter fire. They had been talking confidentially ; I guessed that by the flush on Rhoda's cheek, and the fluster in which she got up from beside Melrose to look after the tea, while he thought it necessary like a true Scotchman, to be absorbed in the newspaper he had pulled out

of his pocket the moment I made my appearance.

“Anything new, Melrose?” said I, doing my part of the small disguise.

“Nothing, nothing,” said Morton, speaking in a strange, frightened tone; and the horrified expression of his face, as I saw, by the firelight, while he hastily wrapped up the paper and thrust it back into his pocket, made me stand and look at him for a minute without speaking. What could have passed between him and my sister, what could his eye have lit upon in the newspaper that concerned us or him so much? My uncle’s death, perhaps. That couldn’t frighten Morton: he knew it would not affect me to such an extent. Yet something had troubled and terrified him, something he thought requisite to conceal from me; he rose and walked to the window with his hand still clutching the pocket, looked out into the twilight, and said, “Dear me, I did not think it was so late; I must get home.”

“Nonsense,” said I; “you will stay with us for the evening. Rhoda has gone off to get the tea.”

“No, Lucien, no; if you please, let me go

home. I recollect something I ought to be there for. I am an odd fellow ; an old bachelor, maybe, though I hope not to be so long, if your sister can be persuaded ; but let me go home now, Lucien ; there are particular reasons why I don't want to stay."

"What has upset you, Melrose ? What have you seen in that paper ? Is it my uncle's death ?"

"Oh, no ; nothing of the kind," said Morton, clutching the pocket more firmly ; "your uncle is safe and well, I assure you ; there is nothing at all in the paper—no news. It is only a Dublin 'Saunders' I bought, for old times' sake, coming down the Strand."

"But you have seen something in it that disturbs you, Melrose ; you don't choose to tell me what it is, and I have no right to ask you. If you stay with us, you know you are welcome ; if you would rather go home, I am sorry you think so little of our friendship and society."

"I don't think little of them—I don't indeed, Lucien," he interrupted ; "don't put such a harsh construction on what I can't help ; but let me go quietly, and make my excuses to your sister."

Melrose was out of the room, and out of the street-door before I could offer further question or remonstrance. I saw him walking rapidly away through the deepening twilight, and Rhoda's blank look when she came up and found him gone was the first thing that woke me from my trance of astonishment. "What under goodness took him off?" said the honest girl; "you and he had no words, Lucien?"

"No angry ones, I'll promise you; we had neither time nor occasion," said I. "I saw him pull out a newspaper as I came past the window; and if nothing unpleasant passed between you and him, Rhoda, there must have been something in that paper which disturbed Melrose as I never saw him disturbed before; he thrust it into his pocket that moment, and left the house without giving me any reason except that he must go home."

"Goodness me!" said Rhoda, "what could it be? Nothing onpleasant happened between us, I am sure; nothing of the like ever did. Mr. Morton is a rail gentleman, and always behaves proper; but I'll tell you, Lucien, just for fear you would think there was anything wrong—he was only axing me," and Rhoda

looked down with a very red face, "in the properest and genteelest way to be Mrs. Morton."

"Well, Rhoda, there was certainly nothing wrong in that, and I presume you said yes, or something to the same effect."

"Indeed I did not, Lucien;" and my sister sat down by me, looking suddenly sad and serious. "Mr. Morton has axed me many a time since he got his legacy settled; not that I didn't know that he liked me before that, and I never saw the man I would put before him, he is such a gentleman and a scholar; Watt Wilson is not fit to hold a candle to him."

"And why did not you consent to have him, Rhoda?"

"Well, Lucien, just for two reasons: first, that I didn't like to leave you all alone, for Mr. Morton wants to live in Scotland; I am not of much use to you, maybe—you have carryings on with that bank lady you don't like to trust me with; I don't say they are bad or onproper; but, oh! Lucien, I never knew good come of nothing that was secret and hidden. From the first my mind told me it would have been well you had never gone near her; and Lucien, I can't leave you till you get into some safer and

more settled way. The second reason is a queerer one, I'll allow, but I can't get over it. Mr. Morton is a complete gentleman and scholar; has always behaved proper to me and everybody; made me the finest speeches and the realest of purposals; but, Lucien, there is something about him too that I can't understand. He hates the Forbes'—that is, he keeps off, ay, the very naming of them, Lucien; if he sees Miss Helen on the road coming here, it makes him turn back; I have seen him do it, though she always speaks kindly and friendly of him. I don't like that keeping of a quarrel so long and hot; it is not like his other ways, for Mr. Morton is mighty sensible and a good Christian, though he is a Protestant—a black Presbyterian, as they say in Ireland. I doubt our aunt, poor Miss Livey, wouldn't have been pleased at my thinking of him at all; but there is no bigotry in him; he told me over and over he wouldn't meddle with my religion, though he says it is not all in the Bible. Howsoever, I don't like him hating and keeping off the Forbes', I don't like his never telling me what they quarrelled about, though I tried to get it out of him as often as there's fingers on me—and,

Lucien, I couldn't tell you exactly what makes me think it, but I have a notion, and it won't go out of my head night nor day, that he knows something about our poor lost brother Raymond."

I almost started from my chair, for with my sister's words came rushing back the long ago, half-forgotten time, when I was a child in Baltimore, talking to the kindly usher of the grammar school about Raymond's disappearance; how his hand trembled as it held my tiny fingers, in the steep mossy path beyond the falls; how frightened he looked, and how earnestly he advised me never to speak on the subject!

That Melrose Morton, my earliest friend, the best man of all my acquaintance, the most truthful, the most honourable, of strict religious principles, and moral conduct without stain or flaw—that he could have connived at, or been concerned in the loss which brought such ruin and disgrace upon our family, was not to be imagined for a moment.

Yet Rhoda's words had struck a strange chord in my memory; her warnings against the bank lady had proved that prophetic instinct so often found in honest and simple natures, and might

not that notion which would not go out of her head night nor day have a basis equally true? Something in my look must have apprised her of that.

“What are you thinking of, Lucien?” she cried, flinging her arms about my neck in mingled love and fear—“what are you thinking of? I didn’t say for certain that he knowed anything; but, Lucien, he might have seen—he might have heard something; and, maybe, the bank lady knows.”

“She does not,” said I, clasping to my breast the one true heart that loved me without deceit or purpose to be served, the one that suffered with me under the same unexplained mystery ever recurring to haunt and trouble our days. A disclosure, as terrible as it could be, had for ever cleared my mind of all the unuttered doubts and suspicions which linked Madame Palivez to the memory of my lost brother. “She does not,” I repeated; “be sure of that, Rhoda, whatever else you may think of her.”

“Lucien, dear, I would think no harm for your sake if I could help it, but no good ever comes out of secrets: tell me now this once, for the love of goodness,” and Rhoda’s tears were

falling fast upon my breast, "is it all right and nothing wrong between you and her?"

"It is all right, Rhoda," said I; but the false words came with a groan as I thought of my pledged promise, the deadly service to which it bound me, my own consequent doom, and the grief and horror it must bring my sister.

"I hope it is, Lucien, I hope it is," she said, withdrawing her arms, and I saw by her sorrowful but indignant look, that she did not believe me.

"That night you stayed so long at her villa, I could not go to bed, somehow, but I fell asleep on my chair here, darning stockings, and I dreamt she came into the room with Raymond by the hand. I saw them both as plainly as I see you now, Lucien; and woke up in a terrible fright, thinking it was true, for neither of them looked like living people. I crossed myself and I said my prayers, but from that dream I know that we will hear something of Raymond and of her; and I wouldn't have talked about it, only when you were at the bank this morning I got a letter."

"What was it about, Rhoda?" said I, trying to recover my composure.

“ Well, it was just about her and you ; but whether it’s a friend warning, or an enemy trying to frighten us, I am not sure. Anyhow, I kept it in my pocket, but I did not show it to Mr. Morton, you need not be afraid of that ; I would let nobody but yourself see what concerned you and me, now that we are the last of the La Touches ;” and Rhoda took from her secret pocket a large letter, which had been sealed with a foreign crest, and was in a handwriting I had never seen. It was properly addressed to Miss La Touche, No. 9, Petersburg-place, Moscow-road, and commenced—

“ Madame,—I write as a disinterested but friendly stranger, to warn you of the imminent risk and danger which your brother runs in his private connexion with Madame Palivez. The nature of that connexion I say not ; the lady has strange ways, if all reports be true, and no man of an humble station ever had the honour of her intimacy without paying for it, either with his life or his reason. She has had familiar clerks before now ; some of them have died suddenly, some of them are in madhouses. Take the advice of one who knows Madame and her

doings well, but does not think it safe to tell all he knows, and persuade your brother to give up an acquaintance which will lead him only to ruin. A sober, industrious young man like him could find a far better and safer situation than he has in her bank ; there are those who would be well inclined to take him by the hand if he gave it up to-morrow ; he might hear of them at the Old Greek Coffee House in Finsbury, any evening between six and seven, if he mentioned his wish to the head-waiter. As you value your brother's safety and your own future peace of mind, endeavour to open his eyes, and believe me, your sincere well-wisher.

“ A FRIEND TO THE SIMPLE.”

The letter had not been written by Esthers, but its style reminded me of him ; it reminded me also of the Baltic merchant who had been so communicative about Madame's disposed-of clerk, a version of the elder brother's history, by all probabilities. It was written in good English, yet the modes of expression were foreign and constrained.

The Prince whose strong inclinations and poor abilities for intrigue Madame had remarked on,

was evidently busy with his satellites and my ongoings. How much, and yet how little they all knew concerning her! What a watched and envied man was I for her fatal preference! Esthers was evidently the chief agent. I told my sister so on the spot, made her understand that he was jealous of my intimacy with Madame, explained that business as well as I could without entering into the depths of it, assured her of my perfect safety, and persuaded her to burn the letter, that it might not disturb her own mind.

“There it goes, Lucien,” said she flinging the paper into the fire; “I would believe nobody against your word, though I know you are not telling me the whole of it. I can pray that the Lord may watch over you, and keep you from all evil, as I think He will, and then, Lucien, no lasting harm will come to you, let the bank lady be ever so crafty and her manager ever so full of envy.”

CHAPTER IX.

THE SAVING DROPS.

THERE was a Cameronian regiment that went out to help in Dutch William's wars, soon after the Revolution of 1688, and had such a tempestuous passage to Holland as they say no ship ever experienced ; yet all came safe to land.

Their chaplain, who records the fact, of course ascribes the bad weather to witchcraft and pre-lacy, the acknowledged causes of all that went wrong with Presbyterians in those days ; but he avers that neither the malice of the enemy, nor the waves of the North Sea, could wreck the ship or drown the men for whom so many godly women were praying night and day in Scotland.

So it may have been that my sister's prayers,

though offered on a rosary, were powerful against the tempest and shipwreck of my soul, which seemed so imminent. I had neither faith nor grace enough to value them then; yet not so little of the latter, as to see her troubled on my account without compunction.

Troubled Rhoda was, in spite of my arguments and explanations, which had silenced but not satisfied her. She had burned the anonymous letter; but its contents did not pass out of her memory with the flare of the paper.

I saw her looking after me when I went out, and watching for my home-coming, and I knew she was thinking of the clerks that were said to have been disposed of. Esthers' machinations against myself, had they been ten times as active, would have been disregarded; there was no harm that he could do me with man or woman now. But that his malice and Prince Dashkoff's designs should disturb my sister's peace, were not to be borne.

Madame Palivez had not taken her manager in hand regarding his doings to the Forbes' as she had promised. I had always observed that she was in no haste to interfere with Esthers.

Latterly she never mentioned him, the Notting Hill House people, the Joyces, in short, anything that might be troublesome or serious.

Of all she had told me that night at the villa, I never heard another word ; one would have thought the whole subject had passed out of her memory, and a general taking of matters easily and lightly had supervened as if the lady had nothing to do but amuse herself for the rest of her days. The change was unaccountable, and almost revolting to me.

Was it the securing of a scapegoat that made her sit down so contentedly under her vine and fig-tree, while the terrible prospect came glooming down upon my spirit like night without a star ? I could not understand, yet I durst not rebel against her royalty by word or sign ; that woman would have ruled over my mind long after my heart had gone from her.

I could never think of troubling her with my private affairs ; they always seemed beneath her attention ; and now it was hard to bring her back from the garden of Epicurus to matters that approached the strange and fearful mystery of her life ; but I would speak to her for Rhoda's sake ; she was never wanting in

resources, and could surely find a way to keep the manager and his Russian highness from troubling my sister's mind.

Having summoned up courage for the occasion, that was still requisite in my dealings with Madame, I went to her private residence one morning before the bank-hour. Like all people of Eastern affinity, she was an early riser, though many a night she sat up long enough to meet the day, and then retired to rest till after sunset. It was a cold, grey day in the middle of November; her rooms were all in their winter trim, the Russian stoves in full heat, the conservatory full of bright exotics, and she in her purple velvet, seated in a small, closet-like room, which I had never seen before; it opened from the principal saloon, its door being formed of one of the large mirrors, and not to be distinguished when closed, and its walls were entirely covered with ancient tapestry, on which landscapes and pastoral scenes were worked in the most brilliant colours I ever saw. It had no furniture but one low sofa, very like a Turkish divan, covered with similar tapestry; on it Madame sat, with what I knew to be her private desk open before her.

“ Good morning, Lucien,” she said looking up from her papers ; “ you have come just in the nick of time. I have been making my will ; my mother’s relative, Cuzenes, a Greek juriconsult here, has taken charge of it, and you will hear its provisions in good time.”

“ Its provisions do not and ought not to concern me, Madame.” I sat down, and said no more.

“ They ought, and they do, Lucien. I have little to leave, except my plate and jewellery ; but they are worth having, as the world goes ; and, with the exception of some legacies to my old servants, whom our successors, the Comenzoni, are not sufficiently bound to provide for, I have left everything to you, of course.”

“ For Heaven’s sake do no such thing, Madame !” Did she mean to bribe me with the price of blood ?—“ I would not have, and I shall not want, a legacy when you are gone.”

“ Why so, my friend ?” She looked at me with unfeigned surprise.

“ Because, Madame, I must go also ; I could not survive you and the service to which you have bound me.”

“ Yes, my friend, you will survive me many

a year, Lucien. I have learned a little of the star-reading—that knowledge which has come down from the wiser races that looked on the heavens before us—and I know that you will live to see gray hairs whitening that black bush of yours.” She smiled on me kindly as she spoke, and continued in the same steady tone—“I know that the time of my own departure is approaching, too; I dreamt of my father last night, and we always dream of the last one that went when our own turn is coming. See, Lucien,” and she took out of the desk a small but beautifully-chased reliquary of fine gold, and, I think, Venetian workmanship; “here are the saving drops. It opens this way;” she pressed a small spring in the lid with her finger; it was a minute rosebud in the wreath which went round the reliquary. It flew open, and I saw a phial, formed like a closed lotus-flower, made of rock-crystal, and full of a clear, colourless liquid, which might have been so much of the purest water for aught the eye could tell. “It has neither smell nor taste,” she said, “but the famous drops of Epaphania, once so renowned in Italy,

were of the same composition, I conjecture.”

She looked at the phial and case for a minute, as if contemplating some work of art or vertu, then closed the spring and handed the miniature reliquary to me.

“ You will take charge of it, my friend ; it is not wanted yet, but will be soon. You have only to pour the contents into a glass of wine or water ; with any mixture they would have equal power ; unmixed, the effect would be too rapid, and might bring suspicion. When I have drunk, take leave of me and go, for within twelve hours after I will be at rest, and neither coroner, doctor, nor any other of the troublesome institutions with which people’s lives and deaths are cumbered, will be able to make out the cause.”

I had taken the thing mechanically, and sat there rigid and silent ; the horrible duty was so plainly specified, so clearly brought home and entrusted to me, all chance of law and blame judiciously avoided and provided against, and she prophesying the years I was to survive her, and the gray hairs I should

see. I could not tell her then how fixed was my resolution—how impossible it would be for me to live with her death on my hand and memory. There was no help, no hope; I was doomed, and so was she. Yet how calmly the woman arranged her papers, told me she had put all that might concern the Comenzoni safely away for them, and that she had burned at least thousands of private letters!

“Written paper is always sure to tell tales, Lucien; and I will not have people gossiping about my grave more than in my lifetime. What a strange business this death is! The nearer one comes to it, the more inexplicable it seems. I wonder if people get any insight by approaching it through slow sickness, as some of our family, who went young, and by consumption, did? Why do you sit looking on the reliquary, Lucien? Are you afraid to take it home with you? It is true the shining thing might catch your sister’s eye—might rouse her curiosity, and she might find the spring. Better leave it in my desk; it always stands here, and I will give you the key any time you ask me.” She had taken the gold box out of my fingers and replaced it in the secret

drawer before I could answer. "You will know where to find it," she continued, displaying the lock, the key, the spring that was to be pressed, the lid that was to be lifted; "and, Lucien, I know you will not fail me in my extremity."

I don't know what I should have said, but at that moment there was a low tinkle at the door.

"Come in," said Madame.

And, with accustomed reverence, Calixi made his appearance, said something in what I knew to be Romaic—it was the language in which Madame always spoke to her Greek servants—and she turned quickly to me, her face slightly flushing, and her look both vexed and angry.

"Lucien," she said, "it is Esthers. I had intimated my wish to see him in private; the truth is, I want to talk to him about your friends, the Forbes', the annoyance he is giving them, and might give yourself, with the help of his foolish highness and the Baltic merchants he sends about the bank. I had intended to do so for some time, as you know—ought to have done it before now, perhaps; but one puts off disagreeable things till one feels there

is little enough time left for doing any small good to those behind. Well, I thought of it, and sent him my intimation, and I suppose it is the Powers of Mischief that bring the creature just when you are here ; perhaps he guesses it, but he shall ascertain nothing if I can prevent him. It may be weak—it may be foolish, Lucien”—the flush on her cheek grew deeper, and her eyes drooped in positive shame—“ but, somehow, I do not wish that prying, ferreting creature to find you closeted with me, and I don't want you to go just yet. Will you sit here quietly, while I step into the next room, close the door upon you, and receive him as he deserves? It is not eavesdropping, for I ask you to stay ; and, Lucien, my nerves are giving signs of failure.”

“ I'll stay, Madame, here or anywhere ”—is it an honour to me that my loyalty never failed or faltered, strange and bad as the service was?—“ but before he comes up, just listen,” and I repeated as clearly and briefly as possible, the warning letter to my sister, and my own anxiety that the manager and his colleagues should be kept from troubling her.

“Don’t be in a hurry, my friend,” she said; “Calixi keeps guard on the approaches, and Jews are accustomed to wait.” She made a few necessary inquiries in a calm, composed tone, but with suppressed anger burning in her eyes; then saying, “I should have taken measures earlier,” closed the door on me, rang for Calixi, sent her commands to the Jew, whom I heard coming upstairs just as I had crept close enough to get my own eye to a crevice between the wall and the mirror-frame, conspicuous in the inside of the closet, and manifestly constructed for observing those without.

CHAPTER X.

ESTHERS ADMONISHED.

THE human mind is a strange engine, and in nothing more strange than its swift variations. A few minutes before, I had been so occupied with Madame's reliquary and its deadly purpose, that my sister's cares and concerns had been forgotten, till Esthers' name brought them back; and now, curiosity to see how the manager and the sovereign lady respectively comported themselves, submerged every other feeling, even that of manly pride, and made me spy upon them through the crevice.

Madame, at least, must have known of its convenience for the purpose, and could not have objected to my making use of it. The opportunity was too much for any curious man to resist; I saw everything in the next room plainly, and

might have heard plainly, too, if I had ventured to creep close enough; but the dread of discovery in such a position—which, by the way, a subsequent examination proved to be impossible, the crevice was so well constructed, wide within and narrow without, after the fashion of windows pierced in the thick walls of ancient castles, and so dextrously concealed by the ornamental work on the mirror's frame, that no stranger in the outer room could suspect its existence.

I saw them plainly; and it was wonderful to see the woman, whose cheek had flushed and eye drooped in manifest confusion at the untimely coming of her manager, seated there in haughty state, like a queen that had the mistakes of her minister to rebuke in private.

I had never seen Esthers alone in her presence before; from preceding circumstances I had half expected something of airs and insolence; but no schoolboy brought back from playing truant could have looked more subdued or frightened, as he shuffled into the saloon, and made his bow with awkward humility.

The embarrassment of the trying occasion seemed to have brought positive clownishness on the generally active and business-like manager;

he muttered something which I could not catch in reply to Madame's "Good morning, Mr. Esthers, please to take a seat," and shuffled away to the farthest corner, where he sat down on the edge of a sofa, rubbed his face with both hands, and looked at the hat he held between his knees. The lady turned her cold, calm eyes upon him—they were just like icicles in the wintry sun by this time—and began—

"Mr. Esthers, I have sent for you to inquire about the account with Forbes' Bank, which was not in its usual place when I had occasion to refer to it on Saturday last, and you were absent from the office, as I have observed you are too frequently of late."

"I was at the synagogue," said Esthers, in a flurried tone.

"No; I am aware you were seen coming out of the bank in Threadneedle-street within the same half hour."

How well she had laid her lines, and how steadily she looked at him! What the manager muttered in reply did not reach my ears, but it evidently gave Madame the key-note of a sound lecture.

She began and delivered it, slowly, coldly, but

in a tone so low-pitched—doubtless that was intentional—that I could hear only the mention of Mr. Forbes and his daughter, my own name, and that of my sister—half words which showed me that we were all spoken of as patronised people whom the bank lady had a general interest in, as far as wishing them well, doing them justice, and having no reflections cast on the house of Palivez by any misconduct of its servants towards them.

The manager was permitted to answer questions and offer apologies in the course of his schooling, and I could see that as it proceeded Esthers' words and looks grew more cowed every moment.

“I don't want to annoy any family, I am sure ; I only went when they asked me, and I don't care for anybody's private affairs—I have troubles enough of my own,” came to my ears at intervals, and at last, out of what a thunder-cloud of suppressed rage it seemed to break—“I have been treated like a dog since that La Touche came here.”

Madame rose up from her chair, walked straight up to him within a pace or two. I could not see her face, for it was turned to

Esthers; I could not hear her words, they were spoken in a low, deep voice; her tones could become as deep as the sea at times. She must have been threatening and commanding. I knew it by the movement of her jewelled hand; but whatever was said to him, in less than a minute it seemed to settle the manager.

He made no reply, and when Madame stepped back to her seat, I saw him rise up in a nervous tremor, his face white and rigid, but whether with fear or pent-up wrath I could not tell, make a sort of obeisance like respect taken out of a man, and hurry out of the room so quickly that one could scarcely see the door shut behind him.

Madame sat looking at it, and probably listening to his retiring steps for some moments, then the pride and the stateliness relaxed away from her face and figure.

“Poor soul!” I heard her murmur, “he was born to share only in our misfortunes, and will be but the instrument of destiny,” and rising with a long-drawn sigh, she opened the closet door, and looked kindly on me.

I have kept you a prisoner longer than I intended, Lucien. There was a good deal to be

said to Esthers, and one must take some time about such matters. When affairs are delicate and complicated, a certain amount of circumlocution is necessary. But I have said my say, and hope he is sufficiently warned to let you and your friends alone. Yet I did not expect it would have had such an effect upon the creature, to threaten him with his brother and sister's state, which he thinks I had a hand in, and one cannot always disabuse people where the delusion may be serviceable. You saw him, did you not, Lucien?" and she pointed to the crevice.

"Yes, Madame; I could not help looking through."

"Tell me, then, for I know you have some judgment of my manager, was it in fear or in anger he left the room?"

"Upon my honour, Madame, I could not say which."

"No, nor could I. Yet I should like to know. Esthers is a strange creature, and came of strange elements."

How much that consideration seemed to perplex the woman who had prepared for her own expected doom with such calm courage not an hour before. She walked up and down the

saloon, gazed on the place where Esthers had been sitting, and questioned me about his look and manner till I reminded her of what then seemed rational to me, that it was of very little consequence whether the Jew manager were angry or not.

“You are right,” she said, “it is a matter of no consequence,” and seemed to shake something off her mind, but it was with an effort. “And now, my friend, we have arranged all, you will come and see me every day as regularly as you have done since my case was fairly put into your hands, my best and only physician, and I will not leave London. I am never to leave it again, Lucien.

“Something within tells me so ; yet I find no signs of the approaching evil. It will surely come to me as it came to the rest of the Palivezi ; yet my senses and my intellects remain clear ; that failure of memory has not recurred again. I am nervous, but it is with the dread of it, and also with the feeling that my summons is at hand. Would it be possible that, notwithstanding the health and vigour of my look, some secret disease was at work on the source of life ? I have felt strange tremors about my heart in the

sleepless nights of late. There was one of our house when we lived in Amsterdam, who had the good fortune to be summoned just when the fatal time was drawing on. Lucien, if that should be the case with me, how fortunate to spare your friendship the disagreeable office ! but such good fortune is not to be expected.

“I have had no other adversity wherewith to pay the Nemesis, and I would not regret this if it did not involve another. That thought has gone to my heart like a dagger many a time since we became acquainted, and I saw you were the man to do it ; but you will think of me kindly, Lucien, when I am gone ; as a friend parted from you all these years by a prison grate—bars too strong for mortal hands to move or file away, through which our hearts saw each other, though dimly, for the place was dark, and, as it were, shook hands and gave pledges to be redeemed hereafter.

“Think of me, too, as one who did not attempt to reward your services, because they were not to be bought or paid for, but bound you to the duty for honour and friendship’s sake. It will be no tarnish to these that you inherit what I have no longer use for. You will have earned

my gratitude in the better and longer life to come. We shall still be friends, though parted for a time. You will fulfil the appointed course, which no impending horror will make it best and wisest to cut short; you will unite your days, I know you will, Lucien, with those of Helen Forbes, the only woman worthy of you, in spite of her father's great misfortune. How heavy and black it lays upon the man! but you and she will be happy in spite of it."

"Prince Dashkoff," said Calixi, opening the door at which he had probably knocked without us hearing.

"He must be admitted," she said, and her servant was told something in Greek. "You will have time to go, Lucien, by the church-yard way. I cannot shut you up again. Shake hands with me, my friend."

She clasped my hands with a grasp strong and warm as a soldier might give his comrade when parting for different destinations on a battle field, walked with me through the conservatory, half down the stair, and when I looked back at the church-yard door with an unaccountable wish to stop and talk with her, there she was smiling down through the tall

exotics, and motioning me to go with a gesture as light and playful as a girl of fifteen. For the first time in my life I ventured to disobey her slightest wish, and stood there gazing after her while she swept back one of the long braids that had fallen loose over her brow and tripped away to receive the Russian prince. It was not with my old fervour of admiration or enchantment that I looked; a powerful touch of pity, of grief for her and her woful doom, had come upon my heart as if I had no personal part in it, and the woman and her misfortunes were separated from me for evermore.

But the next moment the thought of all I had pledged myself to came rolling back like the stone of Sisyphus, and I passed through the overgrown forgotten church-yard with a feeling that its quiet tenants slept well, and a half wish, which kept haunting me for days after, that some cross chance or accident might cut my own thread short before I came to see that service.

I had been always punctual in business, on whatever footing I happened to stand with my employers. Now it was getting late in the forenoon, there was work to be done, and Esthers

would wonder what had become of me ; but I could not go back and sit down to the work in the office with those thoughts upon me. I did not care for meeting the manager either, after seeing his penance done in Madame's saloon ; so I strolled through the little back streets between the rear of the bank and Finsbury—nobody there was likely to know or take note of me till the tide within went down—and I emerged on Finsbury Pavement ready to go back to business.

I was just opposite the old Greek Coffee-house, when my eye lighted on Charles Barry lounging at its door, cigar in mouth, hands in pockets, and in the act of nodding in token of friendly recognition to a man who was walking rapidly down the street. My look followed him instinctively, for I could not mistake the Baltic merchant who had taken such an interest in me and my acquaintance with Madame Palivez, and Charles could tell me something about him. I was by my successful rival's side in a minute ; we had always been the best of friends before and after that trip he took to Gravesend, and I suppose my greetings were warmer than usual for Charles threw away his cigar, said it was a

confounded dull day, and asked me to come inside and have something.

“No, thank you,” said I, “my time is limited. I left the bank on business, and must go back, of course; but can you tell me who is that gentleman I saw you nodding to?”

“Oh, he is a Russian of the name of Rukoff—Nicholas Rukoff, I think they call him—an amazingly clever fellow.”

“What is his business?” said I.

“Well, I don’t know exactly. He is a sort of an agent for some Russian company; but there is nothing he don’t know, private and public, Mr. La Touche; he has been over the world, east and west; knows all America, all the Mediterranean towns; the very heart of China, and all the gaming-tables and spas in Germany. As for London, I think he knows every mouse-hole in it, and everybody’s doings.”

Barry was evidently warming on the subject. “I can tell you he knows all about yourself and that great bank lady of yours. I am sure I beg your pardon if I have said anything to make you look so angry, Mr. La Touche, but by all accounts she is a queer craft and a deep one. I hope you consider me a friend, at any rate. I

am cousin to the Forbes', though they scarcely please to own me now, as a friend I would advise you to keep a bright look-out; there have been clerks in her bank she was uncommon friendly with before now."

"The Russian has been telling you so," said I.

"Well, he just did," said Barry; "you see he knows Madame Palivez, and he knows Esthers, her manager."

"Are he and the Jew good friends?" I was determined to get the requisite intelligence, whatever nonsense it might come with.

"Oh, the best in the world, always meeting here in a box by themselves; lots to talk over it would appear, but it is all in Russian. Between you and me, Mr. La Touche, I think the Jew has got Rukoff under his fingers a bit. Captain Monico—that's a Mediterranean friend of mine, we got acquainted at Malta, he's a fine fellow, though he speaks nothing but the Lingo Franco, and it was to see him first brought me to this coffee-house—well, the captain tells me he thinks Esthers has lent Rukoff money to dabble in Russian stocks with; it seems he does ~~that~~ now, but he has been at a hundred trades,

and his brother is head courier to that Prince Dashkoff that's courting Madame Palivez, and watched you so well that night at the play.

“Monico thinks he must do something for the Prince too ; I have seen him, that's Rukoff, I mean, coming out of the George Hotel in Piccadilly, where the Prince pleases to stop. They say he is running an enormous bill there, and not over flush of money ; that's the reason, I suppose, Rukoff had to borrow from the Jew ; anyhow, Esthers has him under his fingers, and he is the very man I shouldn't like to have the ordering of me—cold-blooded and crafty as a snake, Mr. La Touche ; am I right ?”

“Pretty nearly,” said I ; “but do you think he orders Rukoff ?”

“I think he does, in a manner ; they always meet here ; and though I don't know Russian, it is plain enough that Esthers is asking him questions and giving him commands, and, to my certain knowledge, Rukoff fishes out news for the Jew about my own cousins, the Forbes'.”

“How does he contrive to do that, Mr. Barry ?”

“Well, you see, Rukoff is acquainted with Mr. Forbes' head clerk, Watt Wilson is his

name; Esthers knows him too, but he can't get news out of him; the clerk knows his man, you see, but he is uncommon fond of making money, and the Russian once managed a speculation in Baltic Stock for him, with wonderful profits, I believe; it quite introduced Rukoff to all the bank people, and to Forbes himself. My Scotch cousin is an uncommonly cautious man, but the Russian gets to know his affairs before anybody in London; he told me this very day that Forbes would have a journey north, on account of a bank in Leith that's thought to be shaky, and owes him no trifle. Mr. La Touche, you may take it ill or well, but I tell you what Rukoff says ought to be attended to; he knows your uncle, and how you and he happened to part in Baltimore; could have told me all about the Joyces, if I only met him in time; that would have been a saving for a gentleman, Mr. La Touche, but there is no help for by-gones. And he is one of the most obliging fellows under the sun; when we were perfect strangers, and I had got into a little difficulty with the head-waiter here, he paid off the score in the most gentlemanly manner. Of course I'll return him the money," said Barry,

hitching up his pockets ; “ but these small matters show what is in a man. Long till my Scotch cousins would do the like. He’s obliging and he is clever, Mr. La Touche, and what Rukoff says ought to be attended to.”

“ No doubt it should,” said I, “ but I know my own business better than Mr. Rukoff.” And Barry got the usual assurance that I was Madame Palivez’s clerk, and she my employer, who took no notice of me, except in the way of business, and on account of my uncle, with whom her bank had long and satisfactory dealings. As it was no matter where he went, the unemployed sailor walked with me into Old Broad-street, in time to see Prince Dashkoff’s carriage, with liveried footmen and outriders, dashing away from Madame’s private door ; on which Barry pronounced his decision that it would be a match yet, and I met his friend, the obliging Rukoff, emerging from the office.

Whatever that gentleman’s communications of the ordering Jew had been, I found Esthers in a state of mind which nobody could have expected after the scene in Madame’s saloon. He

was in good spirits, bustling, active, and more civil than I had found him for the last six months. Never did the manager seem more zealous for his business, more careful in the performance of his duties, or with a higher sense of his own authority and importance in the bank, than he showed that day.

To me his good graces seemed entirely restored; he bade me good morning in a most friendly manner, hoped it was not illness that made me so late—I was generally so punctual and regular. I assured him it was only family matters that detained me, hoped he had not found my absence inconvenient, and professed myself ready to make up for it by extra attention to business.

“Oh, you are always attentive,” said Esthers; “we never had an English clerk so much to be depended on; in fact, Mr. La Touche, I wonder your uncle ever parted with you; you would have been such a help and such a comfort to him in his old days. They do say that widow’s son is getting quite grand in Baltimore on his money, and the prospect of stepping into the old man’s shoes. Your sister is not unwell, I hope, Mr. La Touche?” Esthers kept his eyes on the paper

before him, but the voice told me he was anxious to know the cause of my delay, and I responded, "Oh no, thank you, she is quite well; it was only some household accounts that were to settle; my sister is not an adept in those matters."

The story went down, for Esthers looked up quite relieved and brisk. "Well, I am glad you came any time to-day, or I should have been obliged to send for you. It is necessary for me"—how convinced of his own grandeur he looked—"absolutely necessary for me to set out for Dublin to-night; there are matters very important, to the bank, I mean, which demand my immediate presence. The news arrived only last night; Madame sent for me this morning as soon as she got up, I may say; we were consulting together all the forenoon."

I had seen them consulting through the crevice in the closet door; little more than an hour had elapsed since then, yet Esthers spoke with such confidence and complacency, that I felt persuaded reasons of business had obtained him a more gracious interview and warranted his being sent to Ireland on bank affairs.

There was no time and opportunity to inquire into the truth of that persuasion; all the manager's movements made it appear correct; he put everything in order for his intended absence, gave me more minute directions than were requisite, and frequently recurred to the propriety and necessity of my being in the office at the usual hour next day. I promised to be in punctual attendance. The manager's friendliness was so remarkable, and apparently so sincere, that I believed Madame's rebukes and admonitions had taken full effect, and marvelled at the peculiar subjugation in which she held the hard-witted and cunning Jew.

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGE SCENES IN TWO HOUSES.

THE work of the short winter day was over, all things had been arranged for the manager's departure. I left him in the office, for it was his duty, and one he never skirked, to see the bank closed for the night, and took my homeward way, secure that Madame would tell me the why and wherefore he went to Dublin when I visited her next morning. I had got into Threadneedle-street, and was looking for a coach, for I felt uncommonly tired of that day's work, when somebody tapped me on the shoulder, and there was Watt Wilson with, "I beg your pardon, Mr. La Touche, but I have been laying wait for you in a manner. There is a person in Mr. Forbes' office—it's Miss Helen," he whispered, "would be very glad to

see you for a minute before you go home." Miss Helen in her father's office at that hour, and wishing to see me! "Is there anything wrong with Mr. Forbes?" I inquired.

"Well, no, nothing very wrong, that I know of," said Wilson, "but he is not well, poor gentleman; has not been much at the bank for two or three days, and don't look himself at all. Between ourselves, Mr. La Touche, there is something very particular troubling his mind and Miss Helen's too; yet I understand he means to start for Scotland to-morrow, on account of that Leith bank; you have heard what is said about it, I'll warrant, and our accounts are heavy, to the tune of near four thousand. It would be too much to lose; but Mr. Forbes is rich enough to stand it, and I don't think it ought to trouble him and Miss Helen so much, with all their good sense, not to speak of religion."

As Wilson came to that conclusion we reached the bank door: it was open, for they did business later there than in Broad-street, and the head clerk showed me to Mr. Forbes' private office, a small dingy room, in which the fire never burned well; it was smouldering and

smoking away as usual, and the oil-lamp (for gas was not yet in prudent establishments) cast a dim, hazy light on the dusty furniture, the bundled-up papers, and the slight figure of Helen Forbes in her brown dress, dark shawl, and ribbonless bonnet, seated at the table, and trying to look composed and dignified, as became the master's daughter. Yet the first glance I got of her convinced me there was something wrong beyond Watt Wilson's knowing; her look was worn and haggard, like that of one who had not slept for nights, and the hand she extended to me trembled like an aspen leaf.

"It is very good of you to come this way, Mr. La Touche," she said, when the prudent clerk, knowing there was something to be spoken in private to the family friend, quietly closed the door and left us alone, "and it was very bold of me to send for you in such a manner; it is bold to ask what I am going to do. I could ask it from nobody else; but you have been always friendly, and it is for my father's sake."

"It is my duty as well as my pleasure to do anything you wish, Miss Forbes; tell me at

once what it is, how I can serve you ;” and I sat down by her side like a brother.

“ Well,” she said, bracing up her spirits for the effort, “ I want you to go to Scotland with my father. You will think it a strange request, for anybody would ; but oh, Mr. La Touche, he is not in a fit state to travel by himself. I can’t understand it ; I am afraid his mind is affected ; he is not what he used to be—mere trifles upset him : for the last three days he seems to be going out of his judgment.”

The patient, self-controlled woman was by this time crying like a child ; it would have melted the heart of a stone to see the tears streaming down her pale face, and her thin hands wringing in the paroxysm of grief she could not restrain.

“ My dear Miss Forbes !” I flung my arm round her, and laid her head on my shoulder : it was the act of a friend and a brother. Helen seemed to know it as such, and did not move away, but leant there, sobbing and crying like a child on its mother’s breast.

“ What makes you grieve yourself so unnecessarily ; what makes you imagine the like ;

has Esthers been at his work again? I should like to shoot that fellow.”

“ Oh no, no ; don't say that ; it is not his fault : my father gets upset by such trifles. They were in the library together on Tuesday last, and Mr. Esthers showed him something in a Dublin newspaper he had got ; I don't know what it was, for I was not there, and papa will not tell me, only that it does not concern his business at all ; yet ever since he has been so strange—can't mind anything, can't rest by day or night ; never goes to bed without a light burning in his room, and he don't sleep at all, for all night long I hear him groaning and praying. Oh, Mr. La Touche, he must be going out of his mind, what shall I do ? ” she cried, with another wild burst of weeping.

I don't know what I said ; no man could remember his words spoken at such a time ; but with my astonishment at her tale, and pity for the grieving daughter, there was mingled the recollection of Melrose Morton's face when he looked up from the Dublin *Saunders* in our parlour firelight, and found he had particular reasons for going home directly. I had not seen Melrose since ; in all my walks I had

looked for a *Saunders' News Letter*, bought three different copies, but could see nothing in them so to upset my friend. There must have been something, however, which appealed to a secret place in the Scotch banker's memory as well as to his, and I felt convinced it had to do with the subject of their mysterious quarrel. There was no use in mentioning that matter to Helen; she was as much in the dark as myself regarding the cause of the dispute. It must have been serious and compromising too, yet Esthers guessed at it, so did Madame Palivez; would her commands keep the Jew from future meddling? I believed so, and comforted Helen as best I could with assurances that her father's judgment was safe, that everything was liable to be upset by matters small in themselves, but connected with sad or unlucky memories. Mr. Forbes lived too retired, paid too close attention to business, was far too charitable and forbearing with such a creature as Esthers, who did nothing but probe into other people's affairs and troubles for his own paltry ends. But Madame Palivez should hear of it; I would take that upon myself without the smallest mention of Miss Forbes or her father's name.

“Oh, if you would,” said poor Helen, turning her face to me with such a glow of gratitude in it that my caution lost its hold.

“The business is done already, Miss Forbes ; to my certain knowledge, Esthers got such a lecture this morning as will keep him from worming into matters that don’t concern him for some time.”

“The Lord reward her and you !” Helen’s thin hands were clasped, and her eyes cast upward with such a look of earnest prayer as must have brought down a blessing on any other head ; but the golden reliquary and the crystal phial came up to my memory as she spoke, and the benediction fell powerless. “It was kind, it was noble of her to interfere for us, and noble of you to ask her without ever being asked yourself. I always knew there was something generous and good about Madame, whatever strange ways she might have ; and you, Mr. La Touche, you have been always our friend ; if we had taken your advice the Jew would never have got about us, and papa might not have been so troubled. I am sure he has made him worse ; but I am spending your time and my own shamefully,” said Helen, wiping her eyes ; “it

is my weakness and sinfulness, no doubt, that make me stand the trial so badly, for, like all other afflictions, it is appointed by eternal wisdom for our good and purifying.

“But let me come to the subject on which I sent for you: can you, will you go to Scotland with my father? He must and will go to look after his accounts with the Leith bank, which they say is not quite safe. I can't think of his travelling alone; he won't let me go with him, he won't let Wilson; in short, he won't have anybody but you. It was himself suggested that at first, and yet, Mr. La Touche, I had such work to get his consent before I would ask you; one moment he was for it, the next quite against it, and it was only this evening at the last hour that I could get his leave to come here and send for you, for he told me a hundred times it was a thing he could not ask himself, and he was afraid of Esthers knowing anything about it; the manager might offer to go, you know,” and Helen shuddered in her chair at the very thought.

I could not terrify her further by mentioning that Esthers had got the news of her father's intended journey from his emissary Rukoff; but

my own engagement to see Madame Palivez every day made me answer, "I should think it a small matter to travel with your father to Scotland or anywhere else, if my time were at my own disposal."

"Oh, that is just what we thought," said Helen; "and I suppose you will think me very forward, but I left home with the intention of going to ask Madame Palivez myself, if you were willing. I should not be afraid to ask anything in reason from that noble lady, and I am sure she would not refuse to let you go to Scotland with a friend too weak to travel by himself."

I had revolved the whole subject in my mind by this time, and I don't know if it should be called cowardly or not, but my wish to serve Mr. Forbes and his daughter was mingled with a vague hope that thereby something might happen to take me out of the way of the darker service to which I was pledged and bound. At any rate, it would never do to let Helen ask leave for me under the circumstances. Better to go myself, explain matters fully to Madame, and be guided by her wish that I should go or stay.

“You might not be afraid, Miss Forbes ; Madame Palivez is both generous and considerate, but particular reasons make it difficult for me to be spared from the bank just now ; I am the only English clerk, and Esthers is going to Ireland by the Dublin packet that sails at ten this evening ; so there is no danger of him offering to go with your father.”

“What can he be going to do in Ireland ?” said Helen, fearfully, as if she were thinking of the *Saunders*.

“Oh, it is only bank business ; but when does your father think of setting out ?”

“By the northern mail ; it goes at seven in the morning.”

“To-morrow !” said I, amazed at the short time allowed me for thought or leave-getting.

“Yes,” said poor Helen, and a slight flush rose on her thin cheek ; “the time is shamefully short, but you can have linens and everything you want from our house ; and I could not get papa’s consent a moment sooner.”

If one goes to do a service, there is nothing like doing it heartily, and without raising its price.

“If Madame can spare me, I know she will,”

said I; "and it would be more suitable for myself to ask than put you to that trouble. She may be engaged with company at this hour; give me five minutes to write a note here. I will try to get it delivered into her hands, if it is not convenient to see her, and come back with an answer in good time to see you home."

Helen thanked and praised me till I had to stop her with the usual account of how much I and my family owed to her father. I lost no time in putting plainly on the paper her request, and the reasons of it, as far as I knew them; intimated my obligations to the Forbes', and at the same time my resolution not to break through the arrangement Madame had made with me, except she thought it expedient, and craved an immediate answer, as time pressed.

With this billet sealed, and endorsed "Private and important," I started for Old Broad-street, telling Helen to wait my return, and promising not to be long. The evening quiet which falls on that seat of Eastern business was even more marked than it is now: every office was shut, all the people gone or withdrawn into the interiors, a few oil-lamps at wide intervals glimmered through the misty night, which had by

this time fallen, and a solitary watchman, specially retained for that purpose, and armed with his old-fashioned staff and lantern, paced up and down in front of the Palivez bank.

Its doors and windows were fast shut up and barred ; there was not a better secured house in the City. But I went at once to the private door, and, after knocking twice, was admitted by the porter. My request to see Madame Palivez was as usual answered by the appearance of Calixi ; but he solemnly assured the Signor that Madame had already retired to her chamber, and, if the note were in haste, there was no use in giving him charge of it, as, according to the rule of the house, nobody but Madame Oniga or the maids could approach her sleeping apartment.

I was not prepared for that piece of Eastern etiquette ; but knowing the rules of the house to be like the laws of the Medes and Persians, I attempted no persuasion, but bent my steps to the door of the sunk flat, where the Russian housekeeper was sure to be found. There had been uninterrupted civility between her and myself ever since my coming to the bank ; and I had no doubt that if I went down quietly and

made my wishes known, she would do all in her power to further them.

Down I went on tiptoe; there was no sound to be heard, no light to be seen, though I found the outer door open 'as if by some neglect, unusual under Madame Oniga's administration, and stepped into the passage beyond. Nobody yet to be heard or seen. I stood for a moment, unwilling to knock or call—it was not my policy to attract the attention of the household—when a dreary, monotonous sound from the other end of the passage struck my ear. It resembled nothing that ever I heard but the chant which came up with the smoke of incense from the lower apartments of Madame's villa on the night of Christmas Eve.

An irresistible curiosity made me follow the sound, and a faint light streaming from a half-open door at the end of the passage at length cleared up the mystery, for there, in a small vaulted room, with a miniature altar, a Greek crucifix, and some undistinguishable paintings, half-hidden by a sort of carved wooden screen, was Madame Oniga and all the female servants of the house on their knees, and almost on their faces, while the housekeeper read, or rather

chanted, from a large black book — what I guessed to be some prayers from the Greek Liturgy, in the old Slavonic tongue, which all devout Russians consider sacred to religion. The household were at their evening prayer, and it would be imprudent as well as improper to disturb them.

I crept softly away, my eyes now accustomed to the darkness of the passage, and my steps, which were always light for a man, rendered inaudible by the Indian matting, with which the entire house was coated for the winter.

Every turn of the place was well known to me, and I was in no danger of discovery; the clerks were all in their rooms above—most of them retired early, and those who did not were sure to be smoking in the common room. I reached the foot of the stair which led up to the ground-floor, and stepped up a little way, so as not to be seen spying on the household in their private chapel, but there was light above also; a broad bright gleam flashed along the passage from the direction of the bank.

Who could be there, when it was all shut up and silent? I crept up and along the passage, the gleam still guiding me, till I saw it

came from Esthers' office. What could the manager be about so late? The door was perfectly ajar, and there was a convenient angle in which one could stand in the darkness and look right into the room. I stood and looked, for my curiosity regarding the ferreting Jew was boundless.

He was seated in front of his own desk, on one of the highest chairs; his face was working like a gathering storm-cloud; his lips were moving rapidly, but no sound came from them; the long, brown, skinny fingers were in rapid motion, telling his arguments or commands to one no other voice could reach, for, on a low stool, almost at his feet, but with her face turned towards him, and her hands in motion, equal to his own, sat Hannah Clark. While the rest of the household knelt at their evening prayer, she had stolen away, unmissed and unobserved, to converse with the Jew.

Hannah had as little part in Madame Oniga's Greek Liturgy as she had in our Roman Mass; but there was an influence which could reach the sealed-up springs of her life and thought—a tutor who knew how to send his instructions home to her voiceless mind.

How eagerly her eyes followed every movement of his face or hands! How keenly she seemed to comprehend every tittle of the tale he told her—for a tale it was, a long rehearsal of circumstances, and not pleasant ones, which must have concerned himself—Esthers was far too much in earnest for it to concern anybody else.

What summary of wrath and wrong was he disclosing to Hannah, and for what purpose? Had it been uttered in words, though in the lowest whisper, I must have caught its import, from my position and the deep silence of the house. No man knows what sort of learning he may find most useful. I would have given my knowledge of French and Latin at that moment to have been able to read the signs that passed so rapidly between them, for the look of rehearsed injury in Esthers' face was answered by the fierce blaze of savage temper in Hannah's eyes. Whatever was his tale, she sympathized with the Jew in her own wild fashion.

I looked in at the open door, and could make nothing more of it; but at last the manager's look grew crafty and insinuating; he bent towards Hannah as if asking her to do

something for him, and pointed away to the back part of the house. She seemed to comprehend his meaning as a dog does that of his master, but there was instinctive cunning as well as obedience in her look; she rose up slowly to her feet, made a sign as if demanding some pledge or promise from him. Esthers directly held up one of his fingers, and made a motion like putting on a ring.

That appeared to satisfy Hannah, but her answering sign completely puzzled me; it was a gesture quiet and deliberate, and resembled nothing that I could imagine but the act of killing a chicken. Could it be that Esthers got himself privately served with delicacies through the devotedness of the dumb girl? Could that be all they signed about so earnestly, and took such peculiar times to meet for?

Suddenly a sound below, which I could not catch, seemed to startle the manager; he gave Hannah a signal, at which she retreated so quickly and noiselessly, that though her clothes almost brushed mine, she was down the stair, and probably in the chapel; while Esthers, ever careful of his own security, closed the office door with equal silence and celerity, and thus left me

a chance of stealing down in my turn; and I had just got a suitable station at the outer door, when the movements and lights within warned me that the household devotions were over.

I rang the door-bell gently, and Madame Oniga herself appeared, candle in hand. My apologies were soon made, and my business explained; the strict housekeeper was annoyed to see the door left open, but she did not scold in my presence.

I am not sure that Madame Oniga ever scolded—the discipline of that house was all on the silent system; but she said something in Russian to one of the maids, who seemed considerably frightened; told me she was sorry I had been kept waiting—they had been at prayer, and she was afraid Madame Palivez had gone to sleep, but she would send the note up to her by Hannah Clark, whom Madame liked best to come into her chamber, because she was a mute; Madame always liked mutes, and Hannah had grown so useful and intelligent.

Hannah was immediately summoned from the interior; the Russian maid seemed to find no difficulty in speaking to her—signs were in more common use with them than in English

families—and it was curious to see the ready, cheerful way in which she recognised me, received Madame Oniga's wordless commands, took the note and tripped away to the farther end of the passage, from which a stair, with a door at the top, led into the central court, on which the bank lady's private rooms all opened.

“Hannah knows every step and turn in the house, if it were pitch dark,” said Madame Oniga, as I involuntarily looked after her retiring figure, and thought of the scene I had witnessed in Esthers' office.

It was no time to put the discreet housekeeper on her guard concerning their intimacy; the maids were moving about, and I was waiting for Madame Palivez's decision to go back to Threadneedle-street and tell Helen Forbes. I did not wait long; Hannah came back in a few minutes and put into my hand her mistress's card, on the back of which was written, evidently by a drowsy hand, “Go, by all means; good night, and a good journey.”

People accustomed to great power, or wealth—which is much the same thing—are apt to make everybody serve the feelings of the hour,

Madame would not abridge her early sleep with detail or explanation, but she allowed me to go ; that was enough, and I hastened back to Helen. How earnestly inquisitive the poor girl looked at me as I opened the door !

“Madame Palivez has given me permission to go,” said I.

“I knew she would, the noble, generous lady !” and Helen’s eyes spoke more gratitude than her words. “You didn’t let Mr. Esthers know anything ?”

“Not a syllable. But it is late, my dear Miss Forbes ; let me call a hackney coach, and take you home.”

The hackney coach was called, and home we went, leaving the trusty Watt Wilson to make the bank secure for the night. Helen seemed to feel herself and her father safe, since I could go with him to Scotland, but the considerate lady insisted on my sleeping at Notting Hill House, so as not to disturb my own by getting up so early in the morning, and left me at No. 9 to tell my sister, while she drove on to let her father know that he might expect me to supper. Rhoda had been taken into confidence on the subject of my going to Scotland. The friend-

ship between her and Helen had been a matter of slow and steady growth, and seemed to have increased as troubles thickened about Notting Hill House.

“She was here for nearly three hours, talking and telling me all about it. So humble and Christian-like, and so bothered, at the same time, I can’t make it out, and I suppose I never will, Lucien. It can’t be all that Jew’s doing, but he has done a share of it. I am glad that you are going with Mr. Forbes. It will be cold work travelling there in this winter-time, but in course it’s your duty, and Lucien, dear, if he loses a day in the week, or his wits goes a wool-gathering, you’ll fetch him home safe, though I hope nothing of the kind ’ll happen; but one don’t know what to make out of Miss Helen’s talk about him. She is a good young lady, and uncommon sensible,” continued my sister all the while helping to pack my pormanteau, “but she is going to do one thing I don’t like—maybe, it is wrong to say so, and I’ll warrant she didn’t tell you, thinking the mention of her name might be onpleasant—oh! she is the rale Christian—that’s the taking of Rosanna Joyce, Mrs. Barry, I mean, to keep her company when her

father's away. You see Rosanna has been there, tellin' all her misfortunes. Barry is not behaving himself well, never staying at home with her at all, but going, goodness or somebody else, knows where, after bad company, she thinks. Jeremy has taken on with a young woman in a pastry shop, now that Sally is not there to keep him in order. Rosanna's left all alone in the evenings, and short of money, too, and Miss Forbes, partly out of charity, and partly because she will be lonely and narvous, I suppose, after her father, is going to take her for the time to be a companion. She thinks it will bring Barry to the house, and then Miss Helen will give him good advices, I'll be bound; but Rosanna's crafty, and a sort of relation to the Jew villain; in short, Lucien, I think it might be just as well if Miss Forbes would let her stay in Bolton-row."

"Well, Rhoda, we can't interfere in that," said I. "Rosanna can do no harm in Notting Hill House. It is not likely she would be inclined to do any, having no interest to serve; Esthers is going to Ireland on bank business, and will very likely be out of the way till we come back."

“Thank goodness,” said Rhoda. “If somebody would lock him up somewhere there, it would be an uncommon good thing, but the like of him always gets home safe. So will you, Lucien dear, I hope, and poor Mr. Forbes. Was it not strange that something out of a newspaper upset him as well as Mr. Morton? I wonder if it was the same paper, or if——” here Rhoda looked into the shirts she was packing.

“They are both losing a day in the week,” said I. “Have you seen Morton since, Rhoda?”

“Indeed I have not, Lucien. Maybe he is offended at my putting him off so often, and won’t come any more. Just as he pleases,” said Rhoda: but the tears were coming into her eyes. “Gentlemen that is so easy affronted are not worth bothering one’s self about, I am sure.”

“Melrose will come back, Rhoda. Something in that unlucky paper has disturbed both Mr. Forbes and him. I can’t understand it, but I suppose it has to do with their quarrel; but he is an honest man and a true lover not to be offended or put off by trifles. He will come

back, and you'll have him, my girl," and I clapped my sister on the back and rattled on about dancing at her wedding, and going to see them in Scotland.

It was the best way of keeping her off my private affairs, for the thought of her brother getting away so long and far from Madame Palivez had opened springs of wonder, and I thought of hope in Rhoda's mind, though she got no farther than how good it was of the bank lady to let me go, and her manager starting for Dublin.

We parted as we ever did, with fond and kind leave-taking. I promised to write as soon as I reached Edinburgh; to take care of Mr. Forbes; to take care of myself, and come back as quickly as the business would allow.

Rhoda gave me all manner of Irish prayers and blessings; said she had a notion that everything was going to turn out right and go well with us all; that we were coming to the clearing-up of our family troubles.

Dreams and omens in which I had no faith had impressed that belief on my sister; and, glad of any illusion that might cheer her heart

for the time, though it made the fatal secret press more heavily on my own, I left her with a pretence of believing too, and strode away through the dull November night to Notting Hill House.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOURNEY NORTHWARD.

MR. FORBES and Helen were waiting for me at the supper-table. They were sitting close together; had evidently talked the matter over, and her relieved look was a comfort to see. The banker was, I must confess, contrary to my expectation, as composed and sensible as I had ever found him, but looking very ill, and it seemed to me that the man's health was shaken rather than his mind.

His Scottish face was positively gaunt with thinness; the cheeks were hollow, the eyes were sunken, and he had a hard, dry cough at intervals which did not tell of a sound chest. It was a wonder that he thought of going northward under the circumstances, and did not send Watt Wilson or some deputy he could trust.

I would have offered my own services, but I knew that rich men were always most anxious in affairs of property, and it might appear to be taking too much on myself. Mr. Forbes thanked me with his usual grave courtesy for bearing him company on so short a notice, acknowledged his obligations to Madame Palivez for allowing me to go—she was always generous and considerate, whatever else people might say of her. He wouldn't have troubled Madame or me on the subject, but to satisfy Helen.

She would not hear of him going to Scotland alone—good girl, she couldn't leave her father to the care of Providence, without whom a sparrow could not fall.

Of course it was requisite for him to look after his accounts with the Leith bank. I had doubtless heard the rumours about it, not that he placed much reliance on the like. Idle or interested people could always get up reports against a firm, and they had much to answer for who originated or put them in circulation. He knew I was not the man to assist in spreading such reports. Good sense and discretion, not to speak of Christian principle, should keep any rational tongue from that employment. It

had brought many a house to ruin or worse ; and Forbes looked as earnest as if there were a danger of rumours getting up against the establishment in Threadneedle-street.

I had often heard him speak in that strain before. It was part of his scrupulous and conscientious practice to take special care of his neighbours' repute, either in character or business, and all his converse was equally grave and sensible ; nothing odd, nothing peculiar in his manner that I could remark, except that at times he seemed occupied and absorbed in some subject of private thought, which I concluded was the Leith bank, and its bearings on his own.

After supper we had prayers, according to custom. Forbes conducted his family devotions with as much propriety and earnestness as ever I saw him exhibit. There was no perturbation of the banker's mind, that I could observe, on matters temporal and spiritual. How did Helen's fears of its soundness originate? She was not in the habit of taking fancies. I had looked at her two or three times with an assurance that all was right.

I knew she understood me, and seemed to

have got herself into that persuasion when we parted for the night. The sober and trusty footman marched before me with two wax candles to my room—a low-ceiled chamber of that old-fashioned house, comfortably and even handsomely furnished. What a contrast it was to Forbes' own, with a bright fire blazing in the grate, hangings of blue damask, and every appurtenance for sleeping and rising! The footman promised to call me at half-past five. It would take some time to get to the mail. Passengers generally took their seats in front of the Post-Office then, and two places had been secured the previous evening before consulting me, as Helen insisted somebody must travel with her father.

It was all hastily arranged, but pretty well. I thought so, and fell asleep in the richly-hung bed, but it was only to dream the silent scene I had witnessed in Esthers' office. Hannah Clark and he were there, signing to each other; and, strange are the illusions of sleep, there they were talking, too. I could hear them where I stood in the dark corner of the passage. It was all about and against Madame Palivez—vague, indistinct charges of her evil doings to Esthers

—chiefly that she was keeping him out of his lawful inheritance, the wealth and business of the house, willing it away to strangers; that she had driven his brother and sister mad by witchcraft; that she was keeping Helen Forbes from marrying him, and turning her affections to me.

Then their talk became low—a perfect mutter. Hannah's voice in it was like the noise she used to make in No. 9, but sunk to a whispered growl; Esthers was gnashing his teeth and growling too, in a suppressed frenzy of wrath and revenge, it seemed. I could catch no words, but at length I saw him take from his pocket a knife—it was exactly like that with which the ragged man had lunged at Madame in the woodland path, only it opened and shut like a razor. I saw him show Hannah the spring; she tried the sharpness of the edge, clutched the handle, and flew past me down the stairs. I tried to catch hold of her to follow her, but I could not—something kept me fixed in the corner. I tried to cry out and alarm the house, for a fearful sense of danger to Madame Palivez pressed on me, but I could utter no sound. Esthers came out and laughed at me with a

mad scorn, something like his look when he talked of my friendship with the Forbes' on the road that Sunday evening.

Then I heard Helen calling for help somewhere in the office behind him, and woke up to hear the sober footman knocking at my door two hours before the dawn of the winter's day, and knew that it was all a nightmare!

Early as it was, I found Helen at the breakfast-table, in her neat, plain morning dress, not a pin wrong, not a hair out of place. They were used to early rising in that house, generally dressed by candle-light in winter, and she could never think of her father sitting down to breakfast without her. The banker was looking exactly as he had looked the night before, as composed and as sensible. After breakfast we had prayers; no journey or exigency was ever allowed to infringe on the spiritual exercises of the household.

The hackney coach to take us to the northern mail was punctually at the door, Mr. Forbes first shook hands with, and then kissed his daughter, looking sad and solemn all the time.

"Good-bye, dear father," she said, twining her arms about his neck; "take care of yourself,

for my sake, and try to shake off those miserable fancies;" the last words were in a low tone, and there was something more I could not hear.

"God bless and keep my Helen," said Forbes, as he moved away from her and went downstairs.

I had shaken hands and bidden her good-morning, and was going down too, but Helen followed me.

"You will be kind to him—you'll take care of him, Mr. La Touche, I know you will, and if he fall into those melancholy notions again, you'll understand it is only just the effect of old sorrows and an over-tender conscience maybe; I don't know; but you'll do what you can to cheer him up, and I will rest content, knowing he will be safe with you."

"You may depend on that, Miss Forbes, whatever I can do to serve your father's business or support his spirits, will be done with all my heart."

"Come along, Lucien," said the banker, from below, "we shall be late for the mail."

I raised the thin hand that still clung to mine and pressed it to my lips. How

beautiful she looked in the mingled flush and smile that overspread her face, in the earnest gaze of prayer and blessing with which she looked after us in the lamplight, which shone from the hall-door on the drizzling night, as we drove away to St. Martin's-le-Grand!

It is strange to look back from these railway times and see in one's memory the crowd of coaches, the concourse of passengers and attendants, the hurry, bustle and noise which then surged about the General Post Office at the mail hours, and about the notable inns and stage stations in other parts of London. The world of travellers is all changed since then. How much of public as well as private interest a man contrives to outlive within seventy years!

Mr. Forbes and I found our places and took them; he had previously explained to me that we should go no farther than Carlisle with the mail, the nature of his business northward made it necessary for him to call at Glasgow before proceeding to Leith. I believe there was a branch of the bank there, and Mr. Forbes intended to take the Glasgow coach at

Carlisle, arrange matters, or get information in the western capital, and proceed either by post-chaise, stage, or mail, whichever best suited for the rest of the journey.

It was a dreary travel to Scotland in that season, the winter had fairly set in, and every stage let us know that we were getting into his hereditary domains in the north. People accustomed to express trains would have thought our progress slow, but such transits being yet undreamt of, the immense improvement of highways, and increased speed of travelling in late years, compared with the times of their recollection, was the theme of all the elders inside and out. I think the northern mail carried about twelve passengers; we had some variation of company at every stopping-place for breakfast, dinner, or bed—all were duly considered and allowed for in those days. What on earth has become of the large inns in all the towns that lived and flourished by the like?

Mr. Forbes seemed to have no return of the melancholy notions which his daughter dreaded; he took notes of the weather, entered into conversation with the most-serious of our

fellow-travellers, told me his experiences in earlier journeys; they were all confirmatory of the astonishing progress of things, for Mr. Forbes had gone to Edinburgh by the stage which left and returned to London within the fortnight, he had been out thirty-one days in a swift sailing packet from London-bridge to the Leith-pier, and he had journeyed from Carlisle to Glasgow in a waggon which stuck three times in the west country ruts, and had to be extricated by its own passengers.

I felt convinced that the shaking up from ledger, desk, and the daily routine of his retired life, would be beneficial to the banker, even if the rumours he deprecated were true, and his four thousand went by the board with the Leith establishment. The gloomy fancies were put off by the variety of scene and company, the contact of new places and people, and all the enlivening effects of travelling in those days.

Yes, it may be an old man's prejudice, but I hold one saw more of the world, of men and of manners, got the dust better shaken off, and more of the fresh winds of life about

one, in a journey of any length, by stage or mail, than one can get now by running from one end of Europe to the other, with the screech of the steam and the thunder of the engine in one's ears, and everything in art or nature whirled away so quickly from one's eyes that there is no time to take note of them. The crowd in the railway stations is greater, the number of passengers in the train a hundredfold those of the abolished coach; but our haste reduces the multitude to one undistinguishable mass; their individualities and belongings utterly lost to the observer; people have no time to see or to talk in those flying trails of smoke and thunder, and life has become too great a scurry for either thought or enjoyment.

To continue my story. There was life on the great northern roads along which we posted, for they were the only channels of trade and travel; there was life in the roadside inns, where every soul looked out for the coming coach, with bright fires glancing through the wintry mist, and full spread tables seen through their shining windows; there was life in those larger houses in the hearts of busy towns, to whose doors we dashed

up with flaring lamps and bugle blast, though splashed with mud from the heavy weather, and glad to rest for the night.

On the highways and in the travellers' rooms, there was news to be heard, and new scenes to be met with ; there were acquaintances to be made for the time, some of them agreeable enough, as most men will be when out of the groove and off the string, and not likely to come in each other's way again. All seemed to cheer up the banker's spirits ; he was himself, indeed—a livelier self than I had ever seen him—by the time we reached Carlisle.

But the weather was wretched ; the November fog and drizzle habitual to London had set in before we left ; as we progressed northward the drizzle became driving showers of mingled rain and sleet, varied with storms of hail, fierce cutting winds, and hours of heavy Scotch mist by way of calm. It would have been a trying journey for any man of his years and state of health, and I noticed that Forbes' cough was on the increase, but he did not complain of it ; the man's spirit was manifestly up ; his Scottish zeal for business in consequence took a keener edge ; and though both tired and weatherworn,

we pushed on from Carlisle without half-an-hour's delay, being just in time for the evening coach to Glasgow.

The west country roads were particularly deep, and the weather was worse, if possible, that night; we did not reach our destination, the "Buck's Head" hotel, a large and respectable house, still to be seen in Argyll-street, Glasgow, and still frequented by the gentility of northern tourists, till daylight had come as it comes to Saint Mungo's city in November.

Its increasing size and commerce were the marvel of that day; they have increased tenfold since, but the mud below and the murky sky above remain the same as when I first saw them some three-and-forty years ago, for Nature does not change, and she has kept there also the same hearty, hospitable people, with their hard-working weeks and stiff Sundays.

Our arrival happened to be on one of the latter; there was no business to be done, of course. Mr. Forbes congratulated himself and me on having reached Glasgow within four days from London, and also on the opportunity of resting for the Sabbath, and being edified by the Presbyterian preaching, which, he averred, was

to be found in its ancient strength and purity in the Glasgow kirks.

I thought a good sound sleep might have served us both as well, but could not venture to dissent from the Scotch banker on such a serious subject ; I therefore stood gallantly to the guns he appointed me, shared his breakfast of dried haddocks and green tea, to keep us both awake and lively ; and when the bells began to ring, and all Glasgow turn out, till the streets looked like a moving mass of dark rich dresses and grave faces, I got the loan of a Scotch psalm-book and Bible—they kept a supply of those things in the “Buck’s Head” then, whatever they do now—made myself as churchlike as possible, and marched away with Mr. Forbes to the Tron Kirk, where he assured me an orthodox sermon might be expected from one of his own early school-fellows, who was then a reverend D.D. of great repute in pulpit and presbytery.

“He will not know me among the congregation,” Forbes observed ; “it is now thirty years since our last meeting, and I have no time to renew old acquaintance ; but he is a man of great gifts for controversy and soundness in doctrine, and the son of a minister under whom

my father sat, and so did I in my early youth. It was in his kirk I first took the sacrament at the November occasion ; he preached in Liberton then, but was afterwards called to a parish near Falkirk, a pastoral farming-place, and out of the world for him ; he was much run after at the time, you see, and never had an empty pew, but since the people were said to be God-fearing and strict in the good old ways of Scotland, Mr. Henderson preferred them to the Liberton people, who were too near the fashion and folly of Edinburgh. I hear he is minister of that parish yet, and preaching every Sabbath, though he must be near fourscore. People go with their difficulties to him from east and west country, for he is a man of singular insight and experience ; and, Lucien, there are times when I could wish to be near him,' and the banker almost groaned.

We got into the Tron Kirk with some difficulty, it was unusually crowded, as my companion informed me. I had seen a Scotch congregation when marched to the grammar-school pew in Baltimore ; this was a larger gathering of the same grave looks and respectable figures.

In a Scotch church there is nothing to be seen but the people.

I was looking round upon them, let me observe, with sincere respect, for nowhere could be seen such a crowd of intelligent faces, when the minister, for whom they waited in reverential silence, made his appearance in the pulpit.

He was an old man, of a tall, spare figure, with something venerable and commanding in his manner and bearing—a Scottish face which was still eminently handsome, for of all types it is the least to be spoiled by years ; his hair was snow-white and worn longer than the common, his deep-set eyes were still clear and calmly bright, telling of the experience but not the feebleness of age, and Forbes whispered to me, “It is the old Doctor Alexander Henderson.”

There was a glow of positive delight in the banker’s face as he looked up to the minister of his youth, under whom his father sat, and in whose kirk he received his first sacrament, and nobody could have imagined the strong deep voice which filled the Tron Kirk with the expressive if not elegant verses of the Scotch psalm, belonged to one who was near four-score.

The service proceeded as usual in Scotch

kirks; the banker evidently felt no weariness from his journey through the long prayers and unaccompanied psalmody. Perhaps he was at home in Liberton all the time, young and untroubled with melancholy notions, which had come with his gathering years; but when the text was fairly given out; it was—for I happened to mark it in my book and memory, “Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall;” and the reverend Henderson had duly divided his discourse into six heads, with doctrines and applications—the three days’ posting overcame me, and I dropped to sleep in the corner of the pew, most fortunately out of sight, and convenient for that purpose.

I heard the preacher going on from head to head; it was only a dog’s sleep I had, being haunted with the continual fear of nodding or otherwise giving offence to Forbes; when something like a sudden start, as if the banker had got a blow or a fright, woke me up, and I saw that he was as white as his own handkerchief, and sat there with closed eyes, compressed lips, and hands rigidly clasped together.

“What is the matter?” escaped from me in an involuntary whisper.

“Nothing, oh, nothing; don’t disturb the kirk,” he murmured through his teeth.

“You are unwell, Mr. Forbes; let me take you to the inn.” I was going to rise and take him by the arm, when he laid a sudden powerful grasp on mine, and whispered—

“For the Lord’s sake, Lucien, let me alone and take no notice, it will soon be over.”

Our movements were so quiet, and the congregation so occupied with the sermon, that only those in our immediate vicinity observed them at all. I saw that the best, as well as the most friendly course, was to let Forbes have his own way; he was a man of great resolution, and whatever had come over him, was determined to attract no attention, or be the cause of disturbance to the listening kirk. He was wiping his face hard by this time with his handkerchief. I followed the direction of all the assembly’s eyes, and looked at the minister; he had got into a portion of his sermon which seemed to be of more than common interest, and I soon discovered that the reverend Henderson was making incidental reflections on the case of one of his own parishioners, a respectable farmer, and an elder in the kirk, who had

nevertheless been tried, found guilty, and executed for murder at Falkirk. The case made a great sensation at the time, and is still memorable in the criminal calendar of Scotland.

The man had led an upright and religious life, as far as could be ascertained, up to the commission of his crime, his temptation to which was a large sum of money in the possession of a Highland drover, his casual acquaintance, met at a lonely road-side inn, and suddenly disposed of in a wild unfrequented moor, across which they walked together to Falkirk late on an autumn evening.

My memory still retains the impression made by the old minister's keen, clear, and warning remarks ; his text no doubt intentionally chosen, and though the activity of Satan and the might of electing grace was set forth in the highest and stiffest terms of Scottish Calvinism, there was an insight into the deep places of human nature, a logical summing up of causes for and against both saint and sinner, strange to one who had not thought of the like, and yet with a kernel of hard truth in them, and mighty uses of humbling and admonition. These last are the preacher's own words, and while I listened

as earnestly and attentively as the rest of the congregation, the reverend Henderson's discourse, in spite of Scripture phrases and theological terms, brought Madame Palivez to my mind, and I almost heard her say, "Calvinism is but Christian fatalism, and therefore true."

The minister concluded with an earnest and impressive application of the warning contained in his text. Hard and stern as his peculiar doctrines seemed, he had not spared to enforce charity for the backsliding on his hearers, and it struck me as passing strange that the reverend doctor should express a very satisfactory opinion of the final state of his parishioner, whom a jury had found guilty of a deliberate and cold-blooded murder. It was the temptation of Satan overcoming a child of grace and causing him to sin grievously, but not beyond repentance, for he had given signs of being one of the elect, and none of such could be lost.

I had avoided looking at Forbes after he laid that grasp on my arm, but I took stealthy notes, enough to see that he gradually recovered his composure, and at the close of the sermon appeared calm, grave, and impressed, like the sitters around him.

When the service was over, I saw his eyes follow the old minister as he came down from the pulpit, joined his son and his family as they came out of their accustomed pew, and exchanged greetings with their friends and acquaintances at the kirk-door. But the banker made no attempt to claim his recognition, on the contrary, he kept in the background till all the group were out of sight, and then walked with me in silence to our hotel. There we both retired to rest very early; Forbes had tried to read a good book he brought with him, but either his eyes or his thoughts could not fix upon it; he gave up reading, yet was not inclined to talk, particularly about the indisposition which had come over him in church, and fearing to offend him by taking further notice of it, while feeling completely worn out myself, I took the first opportunity to get quietly off to bed.

It was earlier than anybody else thought of retiring; the few travellers who had not gone to the evening kirk sat reading or talking seriously in the public room. Mr. Forbes sat in his own private parlour, leaning his head on his hand, looking into the fire, and advising

me to get to bed, with a promise that he would not sit late himself.

All the large house was quiet, as became its respectable character, in the Scottish Sabbath evening, and, unwilling to break its silence by ringing a second time for the chambermaid to show me my room, I took my candle and stepped upstairs, where the waiter told me she was doing something in No. 15, and would come in a minute.

The upper flats were, if possible, more still than the lower. I called in a subdued tone, but nobody responded; there was light, however, in an opposite room, the door of which stood ajar; I heard somebody moving about there—a female voice saying, “Yes, sir, I’ll have up your breakfast in good time.” Then a man spoke; I could not hear what he said, but the voice was so like that of Esthers that it almost fixed me to the spot.

The woman replied to his question, it was something about never minding trouble for considerate gentlemen, and she would be sure to let him know. The next moment she stepped out of the room, wished him good-night, and closed the door: it was the chambermaid her-

self, a neat, active, and very steady-looking young Scotchwoman; I stepped forward instantly, not to be seen listening, asked the way to my room, and was directed forthwith.

It seemed absurd to myself, but I could not have gone to sleep without knowing who was in No. 15. A man is never very dextrous when worn out with travelling and church-going; I pretended to want half-a-dozen of things, made apologies for giving trouble, looked civil, would have offered silver if I had not been afraid of a misunderstanding, and at last plumped out, "Who is the gentleman in No. 15; I think I have seen him before?"

"Maybe you have, sir," said the chambermaid, surprised but not at all disconcerted; "he is a commercial gentleman from Manchester, and his name is Mr. Taylor."

"Indeed," said I, "then it is probable he is the same." The artifice must have been rather transparent, but the steady chambermaid only hoped I would rest well, bade me good-night, and closed my door also. I could, then sleep in peace; the manager was gone to Ireland about his business in Dublin by that

time; Mr. Taylor in No. 15 was a considerate gentleman, perhaps an old frequenter of the house; his voice sounded very like Esthers', but there were accidental resemblances in tones as well as faces; and he had come from Manchester, doubtless in the cotton line.

One should not have been so drowsy after sleeping in church, but the poppies seemed to grow about my head that night. I had forgotten to bid them call me in the morning, forgotten to arrange anything of the kind with Forbes, and felt somewhat ashamed when I got downstairs in the morning to find that it was late breakfast time, that all Glasgow was at its business, and he had gone out about his.

"He did not say where he was going, sir," said the waiter; "he is gone nearly two hours, a very energetic gentleman, sir; he sat here reading till near twelve last night, and was up before any of them this morning."

That waiter was from Ireland, and in the habit of making similar remarks to all encouraging listeners. His information made me anxious about the banker; his sudden indisposition in

church, the little rest he allowed himself after so much fatigue, and his worn, troubled look overnight, were bad signs, and brought poor Helen's fears of mental unsoundness forcibly to my recollection.

While I was thinking the subject over, Forbes himself came back; the worn look was still in his face, but he was composed as usual, answering my apologies for late sleeping with "You were quite right, lad; you had a long cold journey with me, and there is nothing like a sound sleep for a young heart and good conscience. I remember the time when I could sleep long and soundly too, Lucien, before the cares and the sins of the world came on me, making my head grey and my heart black." Were the melancholy notions taking hold of him, or had he heard bad news of the bank business?

"You have been at the Leith house, sir?" said I, intent on making that out.

"Yes," he said quietly.

"And found things satisfactory, I hope?"

"No, Lucien, anything but that. Of course they did not say so, we bank folk flourish to the last, but I have reason to believe that the

London reports are true, and the house can't stand long."

"You will take immediate measures to have your account settled then?" said I.

"No, Lucien, I won't; I'll never push people over the pit's edge as long as they can keep their footing on it. I know something about being pushed myself. Lucien, never push anybody for money if you can help it; many a man would have escaped ruin, ay, and dark, deadly sin, lad, if he had got time and sparance."

"But it is a large sum to lose."

"Ay, four thousand pounds," he said, wringing his hands, with a look of desperate misery sufficient for the losing of his last penny; "it is hard to lose, and has been worse to gain; but let it go, let it go. I'll never push a tottering house, and you'll not spread reports against it; it is those panic rumours that bring banks down."

"I never intermeddle in other people's business, sir."

"I know it, lad; but we will go to Edinburgh. I have taken our places in the mail; it starts at one, and will get in by six, if we

haven't a snow-storm, which some think is coming. At any rate, we will go as far as Falkirk, not into the town," and he spoke with a sort of shudder, as if there were something fearful to be met with or expected there; "but stop at the 'Barley Sheaf,' an old-fashioned respectable inn on the roadside. It has stood there these hundred years and more, kept by the same family, an offset of the Drummonds of Hawthornden, and properly proud of their descent. The house was once a tower, but they have altered it; all the farm about it is their own, and I can tell you the Drummonds keep good order and sober hours, at least they did when I last travelled that way; so if the snow comes heavy we will stop there for the night; but I am forgetting to ask if you have no objections," added the kindly banker.

"None at all, sir; I am entirely at your convenience, and will be ready to start by the mail at one."

"That's right, lad; come along then, and we'll see something of Glasgow. There is a cathedral and a university worth looking at,

not to speak of the Broomielaw and the shipping; it is a wonderful town for growth and gathering, but nothing to Edinburgh, where I was born."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SIN DISCOVERED.

WE saw Glasgow to as much advantage as it could be seen by the dim and lurid light of a storm-laden sky, with occasional gusts of sleet, which kept increasing in volume and frequency till the time of starting. Mr. Forbes knew the town well, from many a commercial visit. He showed me most of its wonders, new and old; seemed interested and amused himself in spite of the impending loss, over which, nevertheless, he groaned sometimes, at least I thought so. It was a kind of short, suppressed moan that escaped him involuntarily in the midst of our walk and converse.

Of course I did not appear to notice it; but more than once I made endeavours to persuade him that he ought to look more keenly after the

accounts regarding which he had taken so long a journey; and the concern it seemed to give him, combined with his resolution not to push, was more than I could account for.

“Was the man’s mind really sound or not?” was the question that recurred to me, as duly at one o’clock we took our places in the Edinburgh mail, amid the customary haste and bustle in front of the Glasgow Post Office.

The coach held six inside, and nobody appeared to venture on the top; the bitter wind, sleet and snow, which had now commenced in good earnest would have been considerations to face. Everybody was predicting a shocking bad afternoon; but among the four passengers who made up our complement, I recognised the old minister, Doctor Henderson, whose sermon I had half slept through, and yet could not forget. How upright and actively the man of four score moved about!

How well known and much respected he seemed in that scene of tumult! A posse of friends had escorted him to the coach, and he was specially accompanied by what the Scotch would call a *douce* man of middle age, grave, well dressed, and apparently well to do, probably

a Glasgow merchant of good credit, and a ruling elder in some Presbyterian kirk. I never saw the man before or after, and remember him only on account of the conversation in the Edinburgh mail.

It had commenced between him and the old minister before they took their seats, and was resumed as we rattled out of Glasgow. I happened to sit next to the reverend doctor; Forbes was opposite me, and two Falkirk men, who might have been farmers, occupied the remaining space. When our ears had got accustomed to the roll of the coach, every word was audible, and I discovered that the question between the minister and his friend concerned the case which, in Scotch parlance, the former had improved in his sermon on the previous day.

The merchant evidently dissented from the reverend doctor's views on the evidences of the executed man's election—at least, so it appeared to me; and I listened with considerable curiosity to the high and hard divinity which both sides brought to bear on the subject.

With that skill in dogmatic theology which seems peculiar to the Scotch layman, the merchant laid down the eternal law against the con-

victed sinner; and with weapons tempered in the same scholastic forge, but with no arrogation of superior authority, the minister replied to his propositions, and refuted his arguments. A theological controversy, particularly when bearing on a subject of such public interest, would be sure of listeners anywhere in the North.

Every ear and every eye was soon rivetted on the speakers except that of Forbes, who leant down in his corner, and entirely covered his face with his hands. Being nearest the minister I caught his words most distinctly, and as he argued for the undoubted predestination of M'Ewen—that was the unfortunate man's name—as far as signs of grace might be discerned by human judgment, I ventured into the controversy with—

“You are then of opinion, sir, that if a person be one of the elect, his doings, good or bad, are of no consequence?”

“By their fruits ye shall know them, young man,” said the minister gravely, but kindly. “I hold in common with the soundest divines of our Presbyterian Confession, that human works are of no avail to salvation, but only evidences of faith; that a child of God may commit sin

through the corruption of his nature and the temptations of the enemy.”

“May he commit murder, sir?”—I did not mean to be clever, but merely to get the full extent of his doctrine.

“David did, young man, commit murder, and more; yet he was a child of grace, and a man after God’s own heart.”

Forbes had been sitting with a bowed-down, covered face, as if asleep or lost in his own musings, but now he looked up at the old doctor with such an earnest, hopeful glance, and said—“David was forgiven and restored, and why not Andrew M’Ewen or any other sinner of like sort.”

“Andrew M’Ewen or any other sinner in whom the grace of repentance is evident,” said the minister, with calm severity, and I thought he looked Forbes in the face—“but those great and heinous sins which set a flagrant example to the world, give a triumph to the enemy, and cast discredit on the Church, are ordinarily punished in some signal way, either by law or Providence, on this side of time, and no man may think himself out of danger in eternity without making public confession and giving public satisfaction for the same.”

Forbes made no reply. His head had dropped on his hands before the minister's speech was done, and all the rest of the time he sat still and close in his corner, taking no opportunity to introduce himself to the reverend doctor whom he had heard in his youth, and still esteemed so highly, nor the slightest part in the conversation, which gradually became less controversial and more general, for though a grave, we were a social company.

Our talk was very often interrupted by the accidents of the way, for it was a very tempestuous journey. A fierce north-east wind blew right in our teeth, driving before it moving masses of snow, which soon covered high road and field with huge white drifts, obliterating the way-marks, and making our progress grievously slow. The wheels of our vehicle stuck fast in hidden ruts; the horses plunged and struggled through the snow with the loss of shoes and the breaking of traces; there was no help to be had but at the stages, which seemed to lengthen as we got out among the moorland farms and pastures that stretch away east of Glasgow.

There were few travellers abroad. The driver said nobody would come out in such weather

who could help it; but we observed a post-chaise, which seemed to be keeping us in sight all the way, though at a considerable distance, and concluded it was to make sure of its own track on the high road; the superior abilities of the mail-coach horses and men being generally admitted in the case of snow-storms, with which my Scotch companions seemed to my southern ears singularly familiar, though they allowed that such a fall did not come often.

At length the driver intimated his intention of putting up at Falkirk for the night, as he believed that neither horse nor man could get through the east country road.

“Tell him to put us down at the ‘Barley Sheaf,’ then Lucien. I would rather rest there than in the town, for my head is like to rend,” said Forbes.

I said something about his over-working himself, but he made no answer. I gave his commands, and in a few minutes more, when labouring through a heavy drift, we were all glad to see the spires and chimneys of Falkirk, rising as the old town does from the midst of level moorlands, and seen dark and massive against the wintry sky.

Some minutes more and the "Barley Sheaf" became visible. It was a solitary house on the road-side, without hut or hall in sight of it, and about half a mile from the town. It might have stood there from the Pictish times; there was such a look of old and weather-beaten strength about its thick walls and heavy slate roof, I could well believe it had been an ancient tower, the house and hold of an impoverished branch of the noble Drummonds, for though by no means a large house, it was composed of a centre and two wings, the former rising to three low stories, from the high narrow windows of which cross-bow or arquebuss might have been discharged with advantage in times of feud and foray.

That was the original tower, while the wings on either side were manifestly modern additions, built when more room was wanted, and the offset of the Drummonds condescended to keep an inn. Its sign waved and creaked in the gusty wind. Two great oaks which sheltered it in the rear gave out deeper groans and swayed their long branches, now swathed in sheets of snow. A young man was opening a passage through the drift to its door, when the Edin-

burgh mail drew up, and we scrambled out with a friendly good-evening to our fellow-passengers, and no small satisfaction to see the firelight shining from within. They did not seem to expect travellers; but a very respectable woman in widow's weeds came to the door and welcomed Mr. Forbes in broad Scotch, as an old and valued customer, assuring him he was welcome, but she was sorry he would find the house so thronged. It was the market night of Falkirk, and so many farmers were storm-stayed with her she didn't know where to put them.

"Never mind, Mrs. Drummond," said the banker, "I am glad to find myself in your house and glad to see you well. My young friend and I travelled together, and you will put us up as well as you can. People ought to be thankful for any shelter on such a night."

Mrs. Drummond concurred in the pious sentiment, said the weather was ordinary, and she and her daughter, a sober-looking maiden, with high cheek-bones, sensible discourse, and a black gown, assisted in the getting off of our overcoats and wrappers in the narrow passage, and conducted us into the parlour, which served

as travellers' and common sitting-room on the one side, while their private domain, the kitchen, lay on the other. The parlour was low-ceiled, long, and wainscoted. There was neither cushioned chair nor sofa among its furniture; but the grate was heaped high with the best Scotch coal, all in one red glow. The mantel-piece was ornamented with the dark portraits of two or three ancient divines, all in Geneva gowns; I know John Knox was one of them. There was a long table in the centre, well covered for supper, and around sat the storm-stayed farmers, some dozen strong, damp and splashed from the bad weather, and doubtless in a state of hungry expectation, but all in good humour, and looking very respectable of their class. Forbes knew some of them from former calls at the house, and their greetings were kind and friendly.

To all inquiries after his health he made the customary reply, "Quite well," but when fairly in the light of fire and candle, for the short dim day had reached its close, though the old eight-day clock in the corner pointed to four, I was shocked at the change in his appearance made by that bitter journey. The man had over-taxed himself, and was ill

indeed. He tried hard to hold up; got a drink of the landlady's own ale, which, it seemed, was a notable specific, and said it was only a headache he had got. But when the substantial supper was served, Forbes did it no justice.

He excused himself from saying grace, to the evident surprise of the landlady. By-the-bye, she presided, while her son and daughter did waiters' duty. There were no other servants that I could see on the establishment; and while the farmers yet sat at table, growing lively and loquacious over their hot whisky-punch, Forbes requested Mrs. Drummond to show him his room, for nothing but a sleep would do him any good.

"I hope the young gentleman and you won't object to occupy one room, sir?" said the landlady. She could speak very good English when it was necessary to be so genteel. "I have but one to give you, and should not have that either, but three of the farmers are my own acquaintances, and will sleep in the parlour. There are two good beds in it. You'll remember the room; it's the best one in the tower, as we call it yet.

You may hear the wind roaring there, but it won't shake the floor or walls. I have lit a good fire, because the night is cold; and if you want anything, just blow the silver call you'll find on the mantelpiece. It belonged to my grandfather," she said, casting an explanatory glance at me, "and suits this old house better than a bell."

Forbes said he knew the room. It was as comfortable a sleeping-place as man could wish. He knew his friend would have no objections to share it with him. I hastened to confirm the fact, mentally remarking that the banker seemed glad of somebody in his room, and, early as it was, volunteered to retire with him, for the odour of whisky and the talk of turnips and black cattle were becoming powerful in the parlour.

"If you please, sir," said Mrs. Drummond, laying her hard-working hand on my shoulder—"you'll excuse me, but nobody, except in case of sickness, goes to bed in this house before the family exercise. Mr. Forbes has often conducted the worship for me. I had hoped he would have done so to-night; but since he is unwell, my mother's cousin, Elder

Macpherson, will officiate, no doubt, to our general edification."

To be commanded to sit up for family prayer in a roadside inn was new to my southern experience, but my senior traveller appeared to think it a perfectly proper and untransgressable arrangement, saying he had the pleasure of hearing Elder Macpherson conduct the exercises some years ago, and he had no doubt the opportunity would be profitable to his young friend.

The landlady took charge of him; he bade me a kindly good-night, said he should be better in the morning, and I sat down beside the redoubted elder as he afterwards proved, was hospitably pressed to share his punch, and made acquainted with his recollections of hard winters and great snow-falls till the clock struck eight, when the table was cleared, the large Bible and Psalm-book brought in, and the exercise proceeded exactly as I had seen it at Notting Hill House. We had the same reverent reading of a chapter in the Bible, a psalm of the Scotch version sung to an old monotonous tune, and a long extemporary prayer, interspersed with re-

flections on every event of public or local interest, including the McEwen case, and the uses of warning and watchfulness to be drawn therefrom.

When we rose from our knees, Mrs. Drummond looked at me, the stranger, to see if a suitable impression had been made on my southern mind, and I hope the good woman was satisfied, for she showed me carefully up the narrow stone stair, which went winding like a corkscrew to the second floor.

“It was built with the old tower, sir, the middle part of this house, about the time of Flodden Field; it was a small place, only two rooms on every floor; you are going to the best of them; step in, sir,” said Mrs. Drummond.

And by a narrow door at the angle of the stair, I entered a low but comfortably-sized chamber, wainscoted and uncarpeted, except a small piece of what our grandmothers called Turkey in front of the fire; two windows, each in a corner, and hung with blue stamped linen, two old-fashioned beds, with curtains of the same, set against the wall, right opposite each other, with the fire blazing

between them, lighting up a long low dressing-table, a very small dressing-glass, a shaving apparatus fully displayed, and a gilt-edged Bible bound in dark morocco.

It was a primitive, antiquated, but not comfortless chamber; every detail is indelibly impressed on my memory from what happened there. I dream of it sometimes yet, when the winter nights are long and stormy, though the Drummonds are gone from their ancient hold this many a year, and the "Barley Sheaf" has been swept out of sight and mind by the North British Railway.

Forbes was fast asleep; he lay with his face to the wall, so that I could not see it, but his breathing was deep and regular, and I took care not to disturb the worn-out man. No one else could have slept so soundly in such a night; the wind seemed to have become a hurricane, and was roaring in the chimney and in the old oaks outside; but, as the landlady said, it shook neither floor nor walls; they had been put together in the days of strong building; the snow which drove against the windows was agreeably contrasted with the bright blazing

fire ; I heaped it still higher from a wooden box, or rather chest of coals conveniently set in the nearest corner, and went to bed sincerely thankful for the cheer and shelter of that lonely inn.

It was some time before I fell asleep ; the roar of the wind and the flare of the fire kept me awake, though all the house was quiet, and my thoughts went back to Madame Palivez, how it fared with her since I left London, on what business she had sent Esthers to Ireland, and what was the subject of that silent converse between him and Hannah Clark. It might have been those musings that when sleep at last stole on me brought a sudden dream of the bank in Old Broad-street.

I thought I was sitting there in Esthers' office, and Madame came in, looking well and cheerful, but dressed as if for a journey. I saw Esthers and Hannah Clark, also in travelling trim, at the open door, and she told me they were going with her, but I must remain and look after the business. It vexed me sorely in my dream to think that they should be taken and I left behind ; but Madame talked kindly and persuasively, showing good reasons, which I could not remember afterwards, for the arrangement.

Then we shook hands and parted in great friendship; she gave me special charges regarding a large account between her and Mr. Forbes, which I had never heard of before, but was to get settled as soon as possible, for Madame thought it had been lying too long. At the door she looked back, smiled on me, and went away into her own private room, where something had to be done before she set out.

I began to search for Mr. Forbes' account, and was turning over piles of books and papers, when I heard Madame call me from the far back rooms, first in a lower, then in a louder tone, and at last in a cry which made me start up broad awake.

It must have been the dead of night, for the fire was burned down to a heap of glowing embers. The storm without was fearful; but there was somebody talking in the room!

I raised myself and looked about, there on the opposite bed was Mr. Forbes sitting upright; the light which rose from the embers in fitful and sulphurous flashes played on his white ghastly face, but his eyes were fast shut, his hands were in strange convulsive motion, and he was speaking in a low but distinct tone. "Killed, dead

already, and only got three blows ; and all the money is mine—four thousand pounds in gold ; that will pay off old Reubens, and settle the Forbes' in Edinburgh ; my own relations trying to bring me to ruin, and all for not marrying old Willy's daughter. But the bank is safe now, and so am I ; it can never come out ; nobody knows he came here—oh ! what made him come ? but I am safe from the Gazette—from the gallows ; Reubens will never know who forged his signature, I'll take up the bill to-morrow. But murder comes out as well as forgery ; what shall I do with the body ? down under the boards here ?—ha, it's not deep enough ! if I could get it covered with clay ;” and he pushed and strained with his hands, as if putting something into a narrow space.

“ No, no, I can't get it covered, and that sweet angel face, all pale and bloody, will be turning up to me for twenty years ; they'll come to dig here for new foundations when the old house is taken down, and find a skeleton. The beautiful boy will be only bones then ; it will be in *Saunders* ; the Dublin people will talk and wonder about it ; maybe they will mind that my office was here, but they can prove nothing. If

I could get this horse-pistol in—the blood and hair will never come off the stock. What do you want, Melrose Morton, showing me that bag? What if La Touche's name is in the inside of it, and the boy can't be found? I know nothing about him or his money. I never saw them; I don't know how that bag got under the shelf in my office. What if I did pay old Reubens in gold? it's none of your business. You'll go to America? well, I am glad of it, but people can come back. You would not bring your own cousin to the gallows, I know that; but keep away, Melrose, keep away; the story will die out, every nine day's wonder does. But oh, his father and mother! they will go to ruin, they'll break their hearts, and he'll be coming to me night and day; they don't rest, these murdered people, that we put under floors and offices—he'll come wherever I go; there is no keeping them out;" here there was a distinct but muffled sound which seemed to come from behind his bed.

"What's that?" he cried, waking up at once, and his eyes opened on me where I sat opposite him, fixed as very stone, and my face, seen by that lurid flickering light must have told him that all was known to me.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONFESSION.

WE sat and looked at each other for a minute, while the tempest raged without, and the flashing embers went down; then he slowly crept under the bed-clothes as if to hide himself, and turned his face to the wall. I remember getting up with a mortal dread of being left in utter darkness, getting my own candle lit, and heaping coals on the fire. Then I sat down and tried to collect my thoughts, for they were stunned and scattered by the sudden clearing up of that long-kept mystery.

My lost brother's fate was revealed at last—his blood, the ruin of our family, my father's broken heart, my mother's shattered brain, the shadow that had lain so heavily on my

own life, pressing childhood and youth out of it, all were to be required at the hands of the Scotch banker—the upright, pious, benevolent man, whom we and the world had reckoned our best friend. Every word he had uttered in that retracing of his deadly and long-hidden sin through the dreams that must have gone back to it so many a year, seemed burned into my memory. I knew he had done the deed, the how and the why he did it, and for one instant a strong and terrible inclination to take direct and immediate vengeance came over me. I could never account for why it passed away at the sound of his voice, but it did, and the man spoke hoarse and hollow, still keeping his face to the wall.

“Lucien, was I talking in my sleep?”

“You were ;” I could give no longer answer.

“And do you know it all?”

“I do.”

“God’s will be done !” he said, with a heavy groan, “for it was His special Providence that brought you to share my room this night, and I, because of my evil conscience, was glad of a

companion, not knowing that I spoke in my sleep of that which is always present with me by night and day. And now, Lucien, I submit myself to your justice or mercy, whichever you think good to mete out to me. If you accuse me to the law, I will confess my crime and suffer the penalty, no man ever deserved it better; and yet, bethink you, I have suffered a thousand executions all these miserable years from a burdened conscience and the wrath of God; oh, Lucien, they have pursued me in poverty and in wealth, in sleeping and waking, and but for the sake of my innocent child, I would have given myself up to justice long ago; will you bring her to shame and sorrow now?"

I did not answer him; the sudden blaze of wrath over all our ruin past had sunk into its ashes, and wiser, better thoughts came as the unhappy man spoke. The deed was done nearly nineteen years ago, the ruin it had wrought could not be recalled or renovated by a public trial and execution.

The sinner had suffered for his sin, I knew that in the very depths of my consciousness, and his innocent daughter, the gentle, pious, kindly Helen, the woman who loved me with an un-

sought yet pure and delicate affection, she, too, must be involved in the disgrace and punishment of her father.

It may be but an imagination, or that the barrier which divided my life from that other unknown one was worn away and half broken at this part, for in looking back it seems to me that my long dead and buried brother, "the beautiful boy who was only bones now," was somehow present.

His young saint-like face, so fair and yet so noble, kindly, generous, peacemaking ways, all rushed back upon my memory, pleading for Forbes and for Helen, and I felt that his spirit could rest without revenge. I collected my thoughts, and spoke as best I could.

"Your life and your character are safe from me; God will judge between us, and if you have sincerely repented, as I believe you have, no doubt He will forgive; it was a fearful sin, and fearfully did my family suffer by it, but the past is passed, and no mortal will ever hear from me a syllable of the fact; but tell me, if you can, did my brother Raymond come to your office, or did you send for him?"

"He came, Lucien, he came; the poor boy

wanted to ask a question about old Reubens' claim on his father ; that Jew was my heaviest creditor, too. Raymond came through Greek alley from Castle-street, that his why he was last seen there. My office was at the back of the old house. I was alone in it, at the fall of the winter day, and on the brink of ruin. Nobody knew it, but nothing else could have saved me ; oh, that I had not been saved ! But, Lucien, there is a devil, let infidels say what they will," and the miserable man cowered down in his bed ; "it was he that said—not with an audible voice, but in the ear of my soul, when poor Raymond shook his bag, told me he had got four thousand pounds in good gold there, and that would float the Armagh bank over the hard times, the evil spirit said to me—' You are going to ruin, and have forged a bill ;' I had done that the week before, for I could not submit to be a bankrupt, and give the Edinburgh house a triumph over me and my marriage. Next he said, ' There is a horse-pistol in the corner, kept to frighten thieves, though it's old, and can't be loaded ; strike with the heavy stock of it, and the four thousand in gold will be your own.' Lucien, I followed that counsel, the same that

brought our first father to eat of the forbidden tree; my fall was also permitted by eternal wisdom, and I struck three, but I think the first blow killed him. I suppose the tempter left me then, and a horrible remorse, like that of Judas, came on me, but I could not die like him; maybe it was grace that prevented me, for I think I had the effectual calling in my youth, under Doctor Henderson's ministry, before the temptations of the world and the cares of married life beset me. I buried him there, by the last light of the winter day, in the damp earth under the flooring; it was terrible work tearing up the boards and getting the body in, and I thought I had buried everything with him, but I forgot the bag, though I took the money out of it.

“Melrose Morton found it next week in a corner of the office; he was my clerk then, and when the report rose about the boy being missed, when his father came to our house inquiring for him, he put one thing with another, made out what I had done, and told me so, like a brave, honest man, but also said he would never bring his own cousin to the gallows, and sailed with his old mother for America by the next packet. Oh! Lucien,”

the man seemed talking to relieve his memory, “nothing has gone well with me since then, and nothing should. I took up the forged bill, paid old Reubens and the Forbes’ of Edinburgh; nobody suspected me—nobody traced the boy to my office; I locked it up the next week for being damp, and took to another room of the old house, the hard times passed, my bank floated, and I got well established, but there was your father’s ruin and last sickness, there was your mother’s loss of reason. Lucien, I think she did see the boy that night in autumn; and my wife, she was a discreet, God-fearing woman, too good for me, if I had been twice a Forbes, though they did worse than cast me off for marrying her, lending on high interest, and always speering and waiting for my downcome. She guessed, I know not how it was revealed to her, but she did guess, and the thought struck her to the heart.

“Maybe I was not the same she had known me; great and grievous sins make a man different to his nearest; yet I loved her to the last; but the Lord made it part of my punishment that she should pine into a decline with that fearful guess, and die, warning me to

repent with her last breath—she never spoke of it till then.

“In the same winter my two boys were taken from me by a sudden visitation of the scarlet fever, and ever since I have been a miserable, restless, gathering sinner, heaping up wealth that brought no blessing with it, trying to make amends to the family I had wronged so sorely, and hiding my deadly secret for the sake of my daughter and the honourable family I had come of. Lucien, you have listened to me so far ; let me tell you one thing more, and think of it as you may. You were the boy’s last and only brother, and I had a notion that it might make matters up in this world, if I left all my gatherings between you and Helen ; she is innocent of all knowledge, all guess at the crime ; she was a lisping child when it was committed ; she is good as ever a daughter of fallen Adam was or can be, and it was my hope that you nor no mortal man might know her father to be a murderer—ay, Lucien, that is the right word—that she might look on you, and you on her, with an honest unchecked affection, and be happy together when I and my sin were gone.”

He ceased ; and the fire I had heaped so high

sent up a broad, bright column, like the flame of some new-lit hearth by which no sin or sorrow had been spoken. I felt that there were such happy hearths, which goodwomen's presence and children's play made fair and homely, but I was bound on that deadly service to Madame Palivez.

"I shall never be happy with anyone"—it was spoken in sullen sadness—"my family were unfortunate, and so am I. Your daughter would be too good for a better man."

"But you don't care for her," interrupted Forbes; "you are taken up with the Greek lady and you couldn't think of marrying the daughter of a man whose hands were stained with your brother's blood. You are right, lad, you are right; the whole world would say so. Yet my girl, my Helen, is as innocent as the child unborn. I have willed all I am worth, house and land, bank-stock and business, equally to her and you. I know you will do her justice, Lucien, and don't break the lassie's heart by letting her know of her father's sin."

"I want no share of your property, Mr. Forbes, and as I have already promised, none living, much less your daughter, shall ever hear what has passed between us this night."

“Keep that promise, lad; keep it if you can; thereby you will obtain the blessing of the merciful, who shall obtain mercy. You’ll want that some day as well as I; we are all children of wrath, though my sin is most like scarlet. What is that?” he cried, starting up, as the muffled sound again came from behind the bed. “I have heard that noise a dozen times through the night; it is like some one moving underground.”

With a vague superstitious terror creeping over me, I caught up my own candle, looked about and under the bed; there was nothing there, and no room for anything between it and the wall, which the linen curtains covered.

“I know there is nothing to be seen,” said Forbes; “that noise was not earthly; it is not the boy, for he is with the blessed; though once I thought I saw him come into your room with a flash of lightning, maybe it was in conscience’s looking-glass. But the soundest divines have held that evil spirits get power to molest heinous sinners. I know they have been at work about me many a time. Your aunt, Miss Livey, guessed some-

thing of that ; she is dead and gone, and I am going, and what is to become of my poor soul ?”

“ You’ll have time enough to think of that,” said I, not knowing what better to say.

“ The longest time would be too little, Lucien, and mine is growing short. It is my belief I shall never leave this inn. I thought so when we first saw it through the nightfall and the snow, and God’s will be done, if I can get peace and pardon. You have given me both, as far as man could. I know it was sincerely done, lad, though you look so sad and sober ; and no wonder, after such a tale.”

He was looking me in the face now, calmly and kindly, as he used to look when I sat at his table, beside Helen, and suspected nothing ; and the memory of that long, close friendship drew us together, in spite of the horrible secret it had grown over.

He had been tempted, and sinned against me and mine. I, too, was entangled in other meshes. And the woman who led me into them, how wisely had she spoken of his case, without knowing it, except by a sort of divination, which I think she had from nature ; how

wisely of her own also, and how near they came in thought, to seem so far divided ! His enemy of souls was but her relentless fate, and we were all its unlucky subjects. I suppose my look told him something of my thoughts, for he held out his hand, and said, "Lucien, give me yours, and make me sure that you forgive me, and will shield my child from the sorrow and the shame of my ill doing. Say that you are friends with me, for all that's come and gone."

"I am, Mr. Forbes, and I'll stand by Helen, if she ever wants my help, in spite of the world."

I clasped his thin hand as I spoke ; the dark stain on it had been washed out by suffering, and I knew that Raymond would have done so ; his fair face seemed to smile upon me from far-off childhood, as if all the intervening years had been but a troubled dream.

Forbes said nothing, but the large tears rolled down his wan face till he withdrew his hand and dashed them away. We were both silent for a minute or two, the storm without had fallen away to long moaning gusts, which sighed over the moorlands and made the old trees groan.

"It is a dreary night," said the banker, at

last. "Through many a one of the kind have I wished for morning; but my days and nights are drawing to an end; yes, Lucien, I am going, and it were better so, if I could go in peace; I can and should think of nothing else now. We'll speak as we did in former times, before all this was known to you. I can't go without saying farewell to Helen, yet I would not bring her here to alarm the lass, except there were real danger, and then you'll bring her to me; I thought you would when I found myself getting worse in Glasgow, and wrote this slip."

He pulled a pocket-book I had often seen with him from under his pillow. There were notes and letters there. The Scotch banker was cautious and careful to the last.

"You'll take charge of it," he said, handing me a slip of paper, which only contained the words, in his own strongly-marked handwriting,

"Dear Helen, accompany the bearer at once, and come to your loving father.

"ARCHIBALD FORBES."

"You'll go for her when the doctor says there is danger? I'll send for a doctor as soon as the

morning comes. We are bound to take all lawful means, but chief of all I wish to see that sound and godly Doctor Henderson. It is an orthodox and noble doctrine that which he maintained so well in his sermon last Sabbath, that the elect can never fall from grace. I think I had evidence of election once, but his insisting on public confession and satisfaction troubles me on account of my daughter and my honourable family.”

I tried to persuade him to compose himself and get some rest, promising to summon the doctors, temporal and spiritual, to his aid, as soon as the daylight and the snow permitted. But the man’s mind, strong and enduring as it was by nature, seemed unhinged by its inward strife; the terrors of the world to come had taken possession of him, and his thoughts wandered restlessly through the whole Westminster Confession, clutching now at one, now at another hold of Calvinistic hope or consolation.

For myself, I was fairly worn out; the solution of my life’s problem had come so late and so strangely, my own prospects were so hopelessly involved in a service nearly as dark, that the past and the present were equally indifferent

to me—my whole world looked black and hopeless ; and with that last and dreariest consolation of philosophy, that things would be all the same in a hundred years hence, I threw myself on my bed and fell fast asleep.

The last I saw of Forbes, he had turned his face to the wall, and was repeating a psalm to himself, but a noise in the room woke me up when the dim daylight was creeping through our linen-curtained windows, and there he was, putting on his clothes, but white as the sheets, and trembling in every limb.

“ You don't look well,” I said—“ why do you rise so early ?”

“ Oh, I must go by the Belfast coach, and give La Touche the four thousand. It will keep him from looking for his son.”

I saw that partial delirium had come on the the overwrought brain, and with great difficulty persuaded him to go back to bed, while I dressed myself, and went downstairs, for the active household were already up and at work. My first step was to take Mrs. Drummond into confidence. She knew Forbes as a frequent and much-respected guest, and when I told her that his health had been impaired by over-attention

to business, that he had mighty concerns on his mind—bank ones, I took care to indicate—that he had gone beyond his strength in the journey and bad weather, and was now feverish and talking strangely, the good woman at once assured me that she expected nothing else from the gentleman's appearance. He didn't look like himself at all. Elder Macpherson had remarked that there seemed to be some providential crook in his lot, but trying dispensations were sent at times to the best of men.

I wanted to go directly to Falkirk for a doctor, and had taken down my great-coat from its peg in the passage, and put the slip of paper for Helen carefully in its breast-pocket that it might be ready against the medical report, which would probably send me southward, for the impression had grown on me that Forbes' time would not be long; but Mrs. Drummond would not hear of my venturing out in the snow. She said the drift was deep enough to bury houses in the hollows; that I was a southerner, and not acquainted with the road. She would not risk the credit of her house by letting any stranger go out in such a morning.

Her son Tom would go when the day got clearer; he knew every step of the way, and was accustomed to snow-drifts; in the meantime she would look after Mr. Forbes herself. It was her duty, and Providence had pleased to make her well acquainted with sickness and trouble. I had to resign.

The out-door prospect was indeed perilous to unaccustomed eyes. Though the wind had gradually lulled, all round the house was one wide waste of snow piled high enough to cover the lower windows, and leaving no trace of road or fence as far as one could see. It was my first acquaintance with Scotch snow-storms, and I believe was chronicled as one of unusual severity among east country travellers and sheep-farmers.

Mrs. Drummond was as good as her word; she did everything in her power for the poor banker. He continued feverish and half delirious for the rest of the day. Elder Macpherson prayed and read the Bible with him. They all agreed that his spirit was troubled on account of sin; but those pious people considered that a most promising sign of one's spiritual condition, and I hinted to them that in his excited state he

talked wildly and charged himself with things he had not done.

Perhaps that precaution was unnecessary. Forbes could and did keep his own secret ; but nobody could leave the house to find the doctor or minister for him till late in the afternoon, when the snow was pronounced to be getting hard, for a stiff frost had set in, and the widow's son ventured out, accompanied by two of the storm-stayed farmers, with poles and shovels.

They brought back a Falkirk doctor of great repute. It was probably his professional cue to make light of cases in general. He certainly did so of the banker's, assuring us there was no danger ; that all he wanted was rest, quiet, and a draught, which he would send him, if his boy could get through the snow that evening. The boy couldn't get through, and Forbes passed another restless, feverish night ; but spiritual concerns entirely occupied his mind. Having once made confession of his deed to me, he never again referred to it, except in his delirious moments, when he talked the matter over with Melrose Morton, and sometimes with my poor, lost brother himself, always insisting that he was not guilty of the fact.

Next day he was quiet. The draught did not come till late in the evening, and was to work wonders; but it did not. A low fever had evidently set in, which partly affected the man's brain, because it had been overstrained and weakened, and intervals of wandering and quiet succeeded each other.

On the third day the doctor ceased to make light of it, and he told me, as the nearest friend of the sick traveller, that his strength was too far exhausted, and if he had any worldly affairs to settle, it had better be done. It was late in the afternoon when he pleased to tell me.

The frost had continued and increased, the road had been cleared sufficiently for the mails to commence running; the old minister, who lived two miles out in the country, had sent word that he would come, if Providence and the weather permitted, to see his early parishioner on the following day; and with an anxious feeling that there was no time to lose, I wanted to set forth southward for Helen.

To attempt travelling by mail or stage-coach would have been a tedious business. There was not a post-chaise kept at the "Barley Sheaf," but the establishment had, for special uses, a

a light strong gig, and a horse shod for the frost, in which, after consultation with Mrs. Drummond and her son, I determined to proceed as far as the English border, where, by all accounts, the roads were clearer and the snow less. There was a splendid moonlight night coming on. Tom, the widow's son, offered to go with me as far as Glasgow by way of guide, for the west country route was preferred as most practicable, and though everybody tried to persuade me that there was no occasion for such haste, an impulse which I could not define then, nor account for since, urged me to take the road. Forbes had been low and quiet all that day. When fairly equipped for the journey, I went up to bid him good-bye, but he was sleeping so soundly that my entrance did not awake him. I paused for a moment beside the bed; the worn face still so strongly marked and manly, the black abundant hair turning so fast to grey, told much sorrow and suffering, but nothing of sin. No man could have believed the tale who had not heard it from his own lips. He was breathing freely, and was not in immediate danger; yet as I stood there it seemed to me that Forbes' troubles were all over, and his

wretched secret was left with myself. I was turning away, not to break up that sound and grateful sleep, when he opened his eyes, looked up and said,

“You are going to bring Helen to me; the doctor thinks I am in danger, then?”

“No; not exactly in danger,” said I, “but you would like to see your daughter, and the roads are fit for travelling. Doctor Henderson will come to see you to-morrow. Mrs. Drummond will take every care of you. I will post as quick as I can, and Helen will come at once when she sees your warrant.” I put my hand in my breast pocket, as I spoke; the paper was not there. How could it have dropped out?

“Never mind, lad,” said Forbes. “Helen will come on your own word. She would go with you anywhere; and so she might; man or woman never heard a falsehood from your lips, or I am mistaken, and where there is truth there is safety. It is not worth while to write, and my hand would tremble so, it would frighten the lass. Bring her to me, Lucien! I could not close my eyes in peace without seeing her. Good-bye and God bless you!” and he wrung

my hand with more strength than I thought he had—"if we never meet again, you will keep your promise to me and mine, and get the last prayer of a poor and heavy-laden sinner."

I told him my hope of seeing him again, and of his ultimate recovery. They were words of course, but I was in haste to be gone. He merely said, "No, lad, there is no recovery in this world for me," closed his eyes again, and turned his face to the wall. Downstairs I found my travelling companion, Tom, in active preparation for the journey. He knew every cross-cut and short way of the east and west country, valued neither wind nor weather, but never set forth without proper precautions, for Tom was a sober, cautious, and very honest Scotchman. He proved a worthy friend and ally to me on that same adventure, though I thought his examination and securing of our travelling apparatus somewhat tedious.

"It's a bonny night," said Mrs. Drummond, who had come close to my side at the open door to speak of the banker, whom I solemnly committed to her care; she promised everything, and I knew she would perform it—"it's a bonny night." Well might the good woman say so

as she looked out on the sea of silvery moonlight that filled the clear, cold air, and glittered on the frozen ground. "I don't wonder you like to set out, sir. It is just Providence that has sent such weather for you to go on an errand of mercy, as one may say."

"Yes, mother," said her daughter Janet, coming to look out too, for the house was slack that evening—"if the gentleman who had the other tower room had waited for this, he might have got south at once without going to Falkirk through the snow."

"The other tower room!" said I, as a recollection of the muffled sound behind Forbes' bed occurred to me. "I thought you had but one?"

"No, Sir; I told you we had two the night you came," said Mrs. Drummond, and she gave her daughter a reproving glance, which sent that well-disciplined young woman into the kitchen; "but we had only one for you and Mr. Forbes, because the other was occupied by a gentleman who came about an hour after you. He wouldn't go in the parlour, wishing to be quite private—between ourselves, as I know you to be a discreet person, being Mr. Forbes'

friend, he had reasons for not mixing with other folk, though I think it was overscrupulousness. He didn't just say it, but as far as I could understand what he hinted to myself aside on his first coming to the house—and no man ever came in more quietly, he was a Southland relation of that unhappy man, Andrew M'Ewen, and had come to help the widow and family to settle their affairs and get out of the neighbourhood—a trying dispensation, sir, for honest, upright people to have such kith and kin ; but the works of Providence are not to be comprehended.

“ He was so anxious to be private and out of sight, that nothing but a chamber to himself would satisfy him, so I gave him the other tower room as the most out of the way. It opens on the other landing. You could neither hear or see each other. There is a door of communication between the two rooms ; they were the principal ones in the old tower, you understand, but I locked it up to keep them warmer and more separate, and set the beds against it on each side, I'll warrant you never knew the gentleman was there at all ; he went away as quietly as he came in the afternoon of the next day. It was providential that Tom and the farmers went

out to get a doctor for your friend, for they helped him through the snow to Falkirk, from which place he was going south. A very resolute but sober and serious gentleman he was, sir, given to study his Bible, being much impressed, no doubt, by the unhappy case among his kindred. He paid me for my trouble, and seeing he wished to be so private I would not have mentioned him at all, but young folk are a' ready."

I looked out at the moonlight that the worthy landlady might not see the effect of her disclosures. The locked-up door and the beds set against it on each side, explained the noise which Forbes thought so unearthly, and which rather frightened me. Whoever the sober and serious gentleman that slept in that bed might be, he had a tolerable chance of hearing every word that passed between me and the banker; but a relation of Andrew MacEwen, who could not mix with Falkirk farmers for fear of recognition, a Southland man and a perfect stranger too, would not be likely to repeat the tale, yet I felt it would have been safer out of his keeping, and set forth with an unquiet mind concerning Forbes and his daughter.

CHAPTER XV.

ESTHERS' LAST PLOT.

THE old post roads north of Tweed, if more primitive than those of England, had also the advantage of being more numerous. There was not a frequented route that had not sundry highways and byways; ancient travellers can still trace them over moor and hillside, through glen and forest, in some places diminished to mere sheep-tracks, in some relapsed to the heath and moss once more; but those acquainted with them could get over ground remarkably in ante-railway times, and by one such Tom Drummond brought me safe to Glasgow, when the watchmen were proclaiming midnight in its streets.

The solitary journey and social converse we had on the moonlit moors, made good friends of Tom and I. He knew the errand on which I

was bound ; I had learned to estimate his surprising knowledge of by-roads and short cuts, and with a little persuasion he agreed to bear me company as far as the border, otherwise Carlisle, which was the limit of Tom's travelling experience. In the meantime, rest was necessary to us both, and we repaired to the " Buck's Head Hotel," which proved to be a house in correspondence with the " Barley Sheaf," one of the many it could boast, great and small. There we were to have a few hours' sleep, start with a fresh horse early in the morning and push on through Lanark to Dumfriesshire, which, Tom said, had the best and shortest byways in all Scotland, and with the help of Providence, and steady driving, we would reach Carlisle before the turn of the night.

I submitted myself entirely to his guidance ; in fact, I would have flattered or bribed Tom, had either been practicable, for the earnest, anxious impulse to get forward was growing upon me every hour, not so much for Forbes and his daughter's sake, I should be ashamed, so to say, but it was true, that they only furnished me with an apology ; but Madame Palivez filled my mind and troubled my sleep ever

since that night when her far-off cry woke me up to hear the banker's terrible night talk, and learn the fate of my long-lost brother; thoughts of her had come, in spite of the wonder and the fear of that ghastly revelation; and still it seemed as if my dream had been a warning, and the cry a veritable call for my help or presence.

I made Tom understand how early we ought to start in the morning—the setting moon would do as well as the daylight in that clear cold weather. He agreed to start at six; I was pleading for four as we entered the still-open hotel; it was settling down for the night, but the waiter—he from Ireland, who made the comment on Forbes' energy—met me as I entered with “Your name is Mr. Lucien La Touche, sir?”

“Yes,” said I.

“I thought it was all right,” said the waiter. “Here is a letter for you; a Greek gentleman left it yesterday; he did not leave his name, and did not stay a minute, but if you did not come here within three days I was to send it by post to the Palivez's Bank, in Old Broad-street, London, for the gentleman pleased to give it into my charge.”

I had the letter out of his fingers and opened before his speech was done, for it was addressed to me in Madame Palivez's handwriting, and was dated "Old Broad-street, November 15th."

That was the night I slept at the "Barley Sheaf," and heard the cry in my dream; but she was well, the hand was bold and clear as ever, and I read on :

"Lucien, I know not what makes me write to you to-night; I know not if my letter will reach you, but there is a messenger from our house going northward, and I could trust him to find you or anybody. It is half-past eleven, a dark, cold, stormy night, but it can't be the weather that is telling on my spirits; many a worse night I have lived through when the wind was low and the stars shining; but there is an impression on my mind that the last of them is near, if not come to me.

"It cannot be the eclipse I dread, my thoughts were never as clear and calm; but I wish you were here, I wish you had not gone. By-the-bye, Esthers is gone from me too; he was not in your place and I do not miss him so, but he has gone without cause or warning—the first

servant of the Palivezi that ever left his post ; the old house is coming down, you perceive, and rats run from it. But come back to me, my friend, as soon as you can ; it may seem weak and childish to say so, after letting you go, but I never longed so much to see any face as yours within this hour. If the shadow in which I stand is really his of the scythe and sand-glass, and we should never meet again on this side of the clay, I know we shall somewhere in the after life, for our souls are related, and all other kindred or connexion is but the casual companionship of a journey in which there is little choice and much meeting through necessity. May you be fortunate in that share of it which falls to your lot, and wise not to demand too much or build too firmly on it !

“ Take your part out of life as best you may, reckoning it poor enough not to be made poorer by critical examination or censorship. Well that it passes so quickly. I did not think so once, but I do now ; an outlet to the other side of Lethe seems opened for me, and the prospect is vague, but fair ; I think the Fates are not in possession still. Farewell, my friend, I wish you were here ; but sleep is creeping over my eyes ;

it gets more dominant over me as years go on. Farewell! I will go to rest; but come when you can to

“ EUSEBIA PALIVEZ.”

She was safe and well, not yet attacked by the dreaded evil. Her talk of approaching death had grown common of late; but she wished to see me, and I wished to see her.

“ Is it from the gentleman’s daughter, sir?” said honest Tom, as I put the letter in my pocket-book and resumed pleadings for four in the morning.

“ No,” said I, “ it is from the manager of the bank, wanting me back to business; we must get forward if possible, you see; and I went on with my causes of haste, real and manufactured, all the time wondering what the said manager had gone to do in Ireland on his own account, it being evident that Madame had not sent him. He had shown Forbes a paragraph in *Saunders’ Newsletter*, the same that made Melrose Morton start up from our fireside, and which I could not bring myself to ask the banker about.

Was it to make out matters regarding that subject, to fish up information, to put odds and

ends together, and bring the true tale home, that Esthers had gone off to Dublin, and made me believe he went on the business of the house? If so, my best efforts would be in vain to keep Helen out of his power, even if her father were called away beyond the reach of accusation and law.

The story of my brother's fate would be a weapon in his hand which her sensitive nature could not resist or fly from; it would in some sort enable him to annoy myself and sister too. The secret which had foiled such earnest search and long inquiry was likely to be made too clear now that it could serve no good purpose; but things must take their course. I would do my promised duty, and hasten back to Madame Palivez. Oh that some beneficent power might send her troublesome manager to the bottom of the Irish Sea in his out or homeward voyage, I cared not which!

Tom was won over by arguments, and we started at four next morning, with the moon and stars lighting us for many an hour, and the frost standing our friend in getting us over marshy moors and hollows filled with snowdrifts. I know now that the south-west of Scotland is not

all heath and bog, but Tom's short cuts seemed to lie entirely in such regions; they brought us to no large towns, to few villages, to some poor and lonely inns, but he knew every turn and stretch, could tell me how many Scotch miles we saved by avoiding the more frequented highways and seemed to have friends and helpers wherever horses were kept or whisky sold.

We got out of Lanark and into Dumfriesshire about Tom's dinner hour, which I thought unfortunate, for there was another "Barley Sheaf," a house of humbler pretensions, but kept by some relation of his, in the midst of a peat moss through which our road ran, and there he would stop, horse and man, for one full hour—no small clipping out of a winter day. I am sure Tom was perfectly sober when we started, but the by-ways of Dumfriesshire did not seem so well known to him, and, what was worse, the frost was relaxing its rigour in that southern country; small showers of sleet came with the afternoon, changing to rain as it wore on; our ground grew slippery and soft, our wheels got into ruts, and our horse into mires. In short, it was what Tom called heavy travelling, and our progress was proportionably retarded.

Often, but internally, I cursed the peat moss, the "Barley Sheaf," and his dinner therein, as the cause of all our troubles. But the day went down in a dim drizzle, the night came on without moon or star; it was a decided thaw, likely to be a deluge too, and we were labouring through the bogs that slope down to the Solway Frith, the deepest mud and the worst road man ever travelled, and still, by Tom's own computation, ten Scotch miles from Carlisle Gate.

"He is tired, poor beast," said the kindly Scot, as our horse struggled through the mud, that grew deeper every step. "He has had heavy work since forenoon; but if we could get to Springfield, my father's old crony, Robin Armstrong, would lend us his Galloway mare as far as Carlisle, and give us good entertainment too. You will have heard of Robin, sir, on your travels? he is a man of great respect in Springfield; keeps the inn and the forge; and being bailie of the place, does the particular business besides."

"What sort of business?" said I.

"Why, sir, I thought you southern gentlemen mostly knew what was transacted at Gretna Green; Springfield is near by it, and gets quite as many of the folks that marry in haste."

“And repent at leisure,” said I.

“No doubt they do, sir; but I wish we could get to Springfield; there are cousins of my mother’s, Elder Macpherson’s kin, that might be helpful to us if Robin were not at home, but he don’t go much abroad on account of the, comers from England. I couldn’t have mistaken the road, though it looks a deal deeper and worse than the last time I travelled it from Carlisle Tryst, just three years ago come Candlemas.”

Here our horse gave one tremendous plunge and stuck fast, gig and all, in a quagmire which crossed the road. We both scrambled out and did our best to extricate them, but all in vain; there was no firm ground for the horse’s feet; he plunged deeper every step; we could scarcely find footing ourselves on the stray bits of turf and stone. The night was pitch dark, though the rain had ceased; earth and air were wrapped in one damp mist. Our muddy, narrow path was bounded on each side by high banks of moss, spongy and slippery from the recent thaw.

“Guid help us,” said Tom, reverting to the vernacular in his extremity; “we’ll hae to stop here till daylight, and a wet berth it will be.”

Stopping there till daylight was beyond my calculations. I exhorted him to make another effort, and Tom shrunk from nothing. We tried and tugged, but horse and gig stuck fast; I lost my footing, tumbled into the quagmire, struggled up again, and gained the mossy bank, half drowned and very dirty. The footing there was pretty good, I scrambled up with the desperate hope to find some better ground for our weary night watch, but from the top my eye caught a twinkling light far down in a hollow on the other side, and at the same time that heavy sighing sound, which only the wind-shaken woods can equal, reached my ear, and I knew that we were near the sea.

“It is the Solway Frith,” said Tom, catching it too, as he scrambled up beside me, “and that light, praise to Providence, is not wild-fire—can’t you see the house down in the hollow?”

I thought I could, and started down the bank; the ground sloped suddenly, but it was dry and stony, and five minutes brought me to a low, long thatched cottage, standing alone in the midst of that valley of the moors. There was no sign of life but the glimmering light

which twinkled from its fast-shut window, no sound to be heard but the moan of the Solway.

“I know the house,” said Tom, coming up with a whisper; “they call it the ‘Solway Fisherman,’ an ill-reputed place for the harbouring of smugglers; this glen goes down to Frith, you see, and they can bring up their run cargoes; it harbours the worst of the southern runaways too; but I know where we are, within two miles of Springfield, I know the road; let us walk on; the house is no canny.”

“Canny or not,” said I, “if they can give us a light, and help to get out the gig, it is all we want;” and running up to the door, I knocked at it with all my might. There was a shuffling of feet and a sound of low voices within.

“There may be smugglers inside,” said Tom; but I gave another volley of knocks, the door was opened a few inches, and a tall, masculine, sour-looking woman demanded what was my will.

“Light and help to get a horse and gig out of the bog here,” said I. The words were scarcely uttered when there came a cry from within—

“Help me, save me, Lucien La Touche!” and I knew the voice of Helen Forbes.

To dash the old woman aside and rush in was the work of an instant. Tom followed me, for he was staunch. Within there was a narrow passage, and at the end of it a door, from which light shone, and people seemed to be struggling within. I rushed forward, but a man bounded out, pointed a pistol at me, and was taking deliberate aim, when in the desperation of the moment I flung myself upon him; I heard the trigger click, but it did not go off: I seized his arm, and tried with all my strength to push him back and get into the room, where I dimly saw two forms who seemed struggling, the one to get away, and the other to detain.

I saw the face of my antagonist at the same moment—it was Esthers, looking exactly as he had looked at Forbes’ family exercise, but not uttering a sound, and evidently intending to shoot me, if possible. All passed in less than a minute. I heard Tom’s exclamations, and knew he was engaged with somebody in the passage. I held fast for life, and tried to force my enemy back, but his strength was greater than I could have expected; he wrenched his

arm from me, pointed the pistol once more ; but as his fingers were on the trigger, I made another clutch, turned the deadly weapon from myself without knowing what I did, it went off at the same instant, and Esthers staggered back and dropped in the corner.

There was deep silence among us for a minute, as if every one was stunned, but I heard him say distinctly, though it came hissing through his clenched teeth—

“You have killed me, but I have taken revenge on your lady in London !”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST OF THE PALIVEZ.

THERE was a clamour of many voices and a rush of lights; the next moment the old woman got in between me and Esthers, an old man came close behind her; Tom ran to lift up the fallen, and cried, "Lord be about us, he is dead!" but I was in the room, and caught poor Helen as she broke away from the detaining woman and fell fainting in my arms, while a perfect volley of shrieks from the latter drew my eyes in that direction, and I saw it was my once prized and promised Rosanna Joyce, otherwise Mrs. Barry, who was going off in powerful hysterics, which even then I knew to be assumed. My senses were confused and bewildered; but there was another room half open, and out of the tumult I carried poor Helen in,

and supported her in my arms till she opened her eyes, and said,

“ Oh, Lucien ! it was God that sent you ; he brought me a paper from my father, which bade me go with him, and I went taking Rosanna ; I didn't know she was his confederate. We travelled post by strange roads, and he was civil enough till we came here this afternoon on an excuse to put up from the rain ; but it is near Gretna Green, Lucien, and he wanted to make me marry him, saying he had found out something that would ruin my father, bring him to the gallows, he said, but it couldn't have been true. Rosanna helped him, and they threatened ; but is he dead, Lucien, is he dead ; have you killed him ? and I am the cause of all ? ”

“ Compose yourself,” said I. Her brief but clear account had not only enlightened, but brought me to cool judgment again. The tumult had by this time subsided ; Rosanna's shrieks had ceased, though she still sat moaning in the corner. Tom, with the help of the old man and woman—the only inhabitants of that solitary and ill-reputed inn—removed the body to a convenient bedroom, and the young

Scotchman set off through the dark night to Springfield for a doctor and Robin Armstrong.

“Robin is a bailie,” he said. “I can witness, and so can all here, that the shooting happened by accident, that you had no arms about you, and only struggled to save your life; you’ll have to appear, no doubt, but Robin will take bail when he hears the story from me. I think the Macphersons would be sureties for you; it’s a terrible business, but stay here till I come back.”

I assured Tom I had no intention of flying, knowing myself to be guiltless; and sat with Helen talking and explaining, while the house settled down to the silence in which I found it. The old man and woman quietly closed the door upon the dead—they had witnessed scenes quite as strange in their day—and retired to the cooking of black puddings in their kitchen, which our arrival had interrupted.

Rosanna, getting no attention, subsided into real fright, cowered for some time in the same corner, then rapidly recovered her composure, and before Tom’s return was looking and talking as innocently as she used to do when Charles

Barry was up-stairs and I was kept below on account of Sally's fits.

She didn't know there was anything particular on Mr. Esthers' mind when he took Miss Forbes to Scotland; she went to keep her company, and when he talked about Gretna Green, how did she know it was not made up between them? she hoped I wouldn't be the first to blame her, after being the cause of all her misfortunes and poor Sally's illness, she might say.

I should have been puzzled how to deal with her, but Helen, whose good sense and proper spirit were never found wanting, told her to be quiet—she had allowed herself to be made an instrument in a wicked design, and might have to appear in a court of law, on which Rosanna shrank away, and made no further demonstrations.

For my own part, I did not clearly understand how Esthers had managed the affair, till Helen showed me the identical slip of paper which her father had given me in our bed-room at the "Barley Sheaf," and which had been so unaccountably lost out of my great-coat pocket. Then the case was plain; his journey to Ireland was a

tale got up to cover his following us to Scotland. With that strange instinct for tracing and ferreting out which nature had conferred upon him, little to his own advantage, Esthers had pursued us from stage to stage, kept our coaches in view, stopped at our inns without his presence being ever suspected, so great was the man's ability for subterfuge and disguise.

Mr. Taylor, from Manchester, who talked to the chamber-maid in No. 15, at the "Buck's Head Hotel," in Glasgow; the postchaise that followed us through the storm; the relation of Andrew M'Ewen, who wanted to be private, and kept close quarters in Mrs. Drummond's tower room, with a locked-up door and a key-hole between his bed and that of the banker, whose invisible movements struck the overladen mind with superstitious terror, while he got possession of a long-hunted fact which put the entire family in his power; who took his departure in good time, despite the deep and drifted snow, and carried with him the paper which he had probably seen me consign to the pocket of my great-coat, from some concealing corner of the old house, and which he knew would be the only and the surest means of inducing Helen to

set out northward in his company—it was all clear and intelligible, yet how had the well-laid scheme been utterly foiled and frustrated by the accident of Tom's delaying dinner, our gig sticking fast in the quagmire, and my own determination to get help from the ill-reputed inn! So it was ordered, and so it came to pass. Esthers had found his own death in his sudden solution to be avenged on me; sudden it must have been, for no human foresight could have anticipated my coming to the solitary house at such an hour. By that accidental twist in our struggle, the bullet from his own pistol penetrated the right side of his chest, passed through the lungs, causing instantaneous death, as the examining surgeon stated.

With him the secret, condemning as it was and hardly won, by which he intended to command the Forbes family and possess their riches had gone down to forgetfulness and clay, for Esthers was not the man to confide such a weapon to any hand but his own, its use entirely depending on the hold he kept of it. The banker was safe, and so was his daughter; but what did those dying words of the Jew mean, "I have taken revenge on your lady in London.

He feared Madame Palivez, but he also hated her. I remembered his look when leaving her saloon, as I sat in the concealed closet. Madame was well when she wrote to me on the 15th, but oh, for wings to have flown to London at that moment! I scarcely heard poor Helen's thanks and praises for my gallant haste to her deliverance, or deep deploring that I should have been brought to so much trouble on her account; that blood should have been shed and that the unhappy man should have passed to eternity without time to repent and turn from his evil ways. The woman to whose service I was bound by such a fatal yet voluntary vow stood still between me and all others.

Tom Drummond returned in less than two hours, bringing with him all the authorities of Springfield—the doctor, the minister, and the renowned bailie, Robin Armstrong. There came, also, two of the Macpherson kin, who were leading men in the place, and some of Robin's people to extricate the horse and gig, and swell the number of witnesses. The faithful Scot had raised his clan and his acquaintance, and at his station stood me in good stead

with the Springfield men. Not one of them doubted Tom's account of the transaction, or my innocence of intentional bloodshed. They all went into the room and looked upon the dead.

I went with them, heard the country surgeon make his statement regarding the cause of death which was too evident to require much examination, and saw the look of fierce, triumphant hatred, now fixed for ever on the Jew's face. How like he looked to the ragged man when he held the bridle-rein and lunged with the knife! how like his sister Sally, when she leaped out from behind the rose-coloured curtains—they were all the grandchildren of that old money-grubbing Reubens, to whom my father mortgaged Widow Clark's houses, and whom Forbes paid with the four thousand.

The Springfield men agreed it was a lamentable business, and then adjourned to the parlour in which Helen still sat as composed and thoughtful-looking as the minister himself. She gave a clear and distinct account of the whole affair to the bailie. It was corroborated by every soul in the house. Rosanna would swear to all that Miss Forbes said, and was entirely innocent herself.

The old man and woman—by-the-bye, their name was Christian, a common one on the Scotch border—though doubtless in Esthers' pay, had now no reason to misrepresent the facts, and the worthy magistrate decided that my part in the transaction was purely accidental; no man could be blamed for standing on his own defence, and the pistol did not go off in my hands; it was one of the remarkable dispensations of Providence.

The case being thus clear, and every one of us having urgent reasons for quitting the place—I for London, on bank business, of course—Helen to see her father in his sore sickness—Rosanna in haste back to her husband, I think she said he was dying, and Tom to return to his widowed mother and the “Barley Sheaf,”—Bailie Armstrong took our depositions in due form, with all necessary addresses and information regarding us and ours, bound us over to appear when summoned—the two Macphersons being sureties for me at Tom's request.

They may talk of Scotch caution, but it never bars the claim of friendship or kindred—then the bailie took possession of and sealed up the effects of the deceased, contained in a small

portmanteau, and inquired if the unfortunate man had any relations who might be summoned to look after his remains. I explained how Esthers had been situated with regard to relations, as far as I knew it, promising at the same time, that if his nearest connexions, Jeremy Joyce and Charles Barry, did not attend to the matter, I would see his funeral properly conducted, and bear the expense, if necessary.

In the meantime, the corpse remained at the "Solway Fisherman," to await the procurator-fiscal's precognition. The two old Christians hoped that somebody would pay them for their trouble; they knew the gentleman had brought money with him in that box, on which the bailie discreetly advised them to keep quiet, and their claim would be considered in proper time. He also told us that his house in Springfield was at our service, and there was not better ale to be got in Dumfriesshire. I went with him and his company, sending the two ladies in the extricated gig, under Tom's escort; they were glad to get anywhere out of the house of death, and Helen was anxious to speed on to her father. The little village of Springfield had gone to bed,

for it was near midnight, but Robin's house—by-the-bye, it had the sign of “The Blacksmith,” and was a long, low, thatched fabric, much like the one we had left, only in better condition—was bright with fire and candlelight shining from all its windows. They had heard of the accident there, and were waiting for the bailie; his good wife took charge of Rosanna, at my request, to spare Helen her further company. Robin and his party sat down in the best parlour, to have a discreet glass, and moralise on the lamentable business. I parried their hospitable invitations to join them, got a quiet room for Miss Forbes and myself, where I explained to her my anxiety to get back to London, and the safety with which she might proceed northward under the conduct of honest, trusty Tom.

“I know you are anxious to see Madame Palivez,” she said, with a slight quiver of the lips; “was it her the unfortunate man spoke of in his last moments, do you think?”

“I don't know; I am afraid it was, though I cannot understand what he meant. That and many considerations make me wish to get south as quickly as possible, and I know you will be safe with Tom. I would not send any one

with you, Miss Forbes, in whom I could not place the most perfect confidence."

"I am sure of that," said Helen; "get forward, and I will try to do the same."

I should have felt rebuked by her sad and chagrined look at any other time, but my mind was full of old Broad-street and its lady. I took Tom Drummond aside from his moralising friends, made him sensible of the duty he had to do for me, for Miss Forbes, and her father, and promised everlasting friendship and gratitude for the same.

"I'll take her to the 'Barley Sheaf' safe enough, sir," said the honest fellow. "I think the weather is going to be fine, and we'll take the high road. The young lady won't be in such a hurry as you were, and I have asked Robin Armstrong to lend you his Galloway mare—she'll go like the wind—and a kind of a light trap he has, and take you to Carlisle in time for the night mail. It starts at half-past one now, and you won't get to London a quicker way, as there is nobody to take you through the by-roads of England. I'll stop here for the night; so will the young lady, I'll warrant. It is a very decent house," said Tom, in a

whisper; "we'll start early in the morning, and get to Glasgow before nightfall, with the help of Providence; and an hour's run to Carlisle is nothing to Robin's Galloway mare. I suppose that other woman will be going back to England by the Gretna coach.

"She is a lass one would not care to travel too far with by all accounts, but Robin's wife will look after her. Do come in, sir, and get some refreshment before you go; they are just putting the mare in the trap."

I spent little time with Tom and his companion. Before the clock struck twelve I was rattling away with the Galloway mare and an experienced driver on the Carlisle road. The night was calm and the moon was rising. The road, though muddy, was not like those we had traversed on the preceding day, and I reached the frontier town of England in time to get the only vacant place in the night mail to London. It was the quickest mode of travelling I could find; but the miles seemed so long and the stoppages so many. Looking back on that time of suspense and anxiety makes one appreciate the express train and the telegraph of these days.

To London ! to London ! my heart flew far before the swiftest wheels and the best blood horses which then carried northern mails. It would have outstripped any locomotion ; but the journey was done at last. We reached St. Martin's-le-Grand in the forenoon of a dim foggy day, the sky all mist and the streets all mud, and through them I sped to Old Broad-street. There was a chaise going off, and a number of respectable-looking city men scattering away from the private door.

What could they have been doing there? Another look, and I saw a hatchment over it. "Is Madame at home?" I inquired of the porter, pushing in as he was about to close.

"Madame is at home for evermore," said the Eastern man, giving me a grave, stern look from head to foot ; "she is going to rest with her ancestors in the vault beneath St. Nicholas' Church, in Kief. May her soul find peace!"

"Dead!" said I, and the sight left my eyes for the moment.

"Yes, dead," said the porter. "Why was the Signor absent when her trusted manager had left his post without leave, and the illustrious high-born Eusebia Palivez—the last and

noblest of her princely line—was found in her own chamber, foully murdered by the mute maid she had taken from the Signor's house?"

Before he had well spoken it, all flashed on my brain: the meaning of the Jew's last words; the meaning of his nightly conference with Hannah which I had the chance to see, but did not understand, or the deed might have been prevented. It may be that my desperate, horrified look frightened the porter, for he stepped back and I passed him, walking straight up to the saloon where I had seen her last rebuking Esthers, to which she had gone up from me to receive Prince Dashkoff. Nobody prevented, nobody noticed me, till I got into the room; it was hung with black drapery, which covered walls and windows.

In the centre stood a kind of platform, also covered with black and set round with wax candles; on it there lay a coffin covered with purple—the Palivez colour in life and death. It had a gold plate with a Greek inscription, which I could not read; but I knew what that coffin hid from me for ever, and scarce knowing what I did, I stepped into the circle of Greek priests and servants all in mourning dresses to a

brave, elderly man, with a lawyer's face, but a Greek also, who was sealing a piece of purple silk over its lock, while a priest in full canonicals held the key.

"I was her friend in life. She trusted and talked with me. For mercy's sake let me see her face for the last time?" and I pressed nearer.

"It cannot be, young man," said the Greek lawyer, calmly finishing his work—it was not the family crest, but a cross and crown he sealed it with—"it cannot be; the face once so fair is covered to the resurrection-day. Pray that you may see it then among the just."

The priest placed the key in his hands, and the entire circle sank on their knees while he chanted a short prayer, to which the assistant priest responded in long-drawn dreary tones till it sounded like a requiem. Then they sprinkled the coffin with holy water, made the sign of the Greek cross seven times upon it, and all prayed in silence for the soul of the dead.

In a few minutes the kneeling circle rose; the family crest and escutcheon were brought in by

old Marco, and the man who had sealed the coffin—he was Cuzenes, the juris-consult, who lived and did business in London long after—broke them over its lid, at the same time proclaiming in Greek, Russian, and English, that the last of the Palivezi was gone to God and to the souls of all her line in the Paradise of the Patriarchs; that none of her name or lineage now remained on earth, and her house, sprung from the princes of Egina, and without blot or stain for fifteen hundred years, had passed from among the living.

“May their souls find peace, and the will of the Highest be done!” he added.

And the prayer was repeated by all the circle, who immediately began to scatter away, the whole ceremonial being concluded except the funeral feast, which, according to Greek custom, was spread in the rooms below.

I would have given the world to break that seal and see her face once more. It was a foolish thought, perhaps, but I made one last appeal to Madame Oniga, who was there as the chief of the household.

“It cannot be, signor,” she said, “and it

should not. These English had to see her according to their law—the inquest, as they call it—may shame fall on them! but no man should see the last lady of the Palivezi with a gashed throat and a bloody shroud. We think it strange that the signor should have been absent. Was he not her friend?”

The Russian woman spoke out the thought of the entire household, for every one of them cast grave, reproving looks on me, and I believe regarded me with suspicion ever after, for that unaccountable absence I did not care to justify myself then, and I have taken no trouble about it since, but as I turned away a sudden thought crossed me.

“When did it happen?” I enquired.

“On the night of the fifteenth; we know not at what hour, nor how the dumb girl got access to her chamber, which Madame always locked in the inside. It was found open in the morning, and our noble mistress was dead—slain in her sleep, it seemed—and when the house was searched for the murderer, blood was found on the dumb girl’s clothes, and a knife, which one of the maids had seen by chance in her hands, stained in the same fashion and

hidden under her bed. Will not the signor come to the funeral feast? it was the will of God to take our mistress so, and none of us may sorrow too much without sin," said Madame Oniga, as I turned away once more, feeling that my life had fallen to ruins, and the light of all its summers lay sealed up in that coffin.

Maybe it was well that it had been sealed, and that Greek pride or prejudice denied me that last look on the face of the dead; thereby no memory of blood or of grave-clothes blends with my recollection of her. It is still as I saw her last up among the hanging flowers and arching boughs, waving her white hand to me in careless freedom and flinging back the braids of her bright hair. Her last letter was written to me with the shadow of death falling on her fearless spirit. She had wished me by her side, trusted, and believed in me, and given me those last counsels while she stood on the borders of the grave.

On the night of the fifteenth—on the night of the fearful storm, which had rocked the old house on the Falkirk-moor, and made the oaks about it groan from their ancient hearts—they

knew not at what hour, but could it have been the very same at which I saw her in my dream, prepared for a far journey, on which Hannah Clark and Esthers were to bear her company, to my vexation, and heard her call to me from the far back rooms so loudly and wildly that it woke me up to hear the tempest raging without and the conscience-stricken banker within talking in his sleep of my brother's murder! It may be superstition, but I believe it was her death-hour and her voice that gave me the sign and brought me out of sleep, to hear the revelation she had guessed at so long, and I had once suspected her of knowing too well.

Life has mysteries which run deep into the invisible state, though never to be proved to commonplace and untried people, and that dream became a link between her and me which the grave could not break, nor the years wear away. My mind has recovered from the shock of that day's discovery, but the blow was heavy for the time.

It seems absurd to me now, unreasonable, and something to be ashamed of, but it is true, so strangely does great and sudden grief

affect us, that I bitterly regretted the evil chance which cancelled my vow, prevented my doing her that last service, and the sacrifice of myself to her shade. I have lived to be thankful for the fact, though not for the manner of it, but then my reason and my conscience were both stupified.

I turned away from Madame Oniga and the funeral feast. I could not look again on the coffin and the wax candles around it, which should burn there night and day till it was moved into the Russian ship and borne away to Petersburg, and thence over plain and river to the family vault in Kief. As I went downstairs, there was somebody waiting for me. I did not notice her at first, but it was my sister Rhoda—wise and noble girl.

She said not one single word, but took me by the arm, and walked with me some way through the streets. Then I saw Melrose Morton was at my other side, and we were going to the old Greek Coffee-house in Finsbury Pavement. It was silent and deserted-looking, exactly as I had seen it that first Christmas-day of mine in London, when Watt Wilson told my family's tale to Esthers. The time was but four years

ago, and what a cycle of life I had passed through since then !

In the coffee-house we all sat down, and they told me everything they knew of the inquest, and of Hannah's evident guilt. The whole, though corroborated by many additional circumstances, amounted only to what I had already heard from Madame Oniga.

My sister had sent for Melrose as soon as the news reached her, and gone to look after the criminal creature with whom she had held such early companionship. Rhoda was a brave girl, and a sensible one ; but I think Hannah's deed gave to all her after life a tinge of superstitious terror regarding the deaf and dumb.

“ I went before all the gentlemen and talked to her ; maybe it was bold, but nobody else could speak to the creature at all ; and, Lucien, she holds out she didn't do it, but that Madame killed herself, which I know, in my own conscience, is not true ; not to speak of the signs against her, and her telling me that Esthers was to be heir of all Madame's bank and riches, and that he would marry her and make her a lady. That's the way the villain bribed her up to it, you see ; women can be got to do anything for

wicked men that takes the right way with them," said Rhoda; "but when she knows that he is dead and gone—goodness! but the works of Providence is wonderful!—she'll own it, maybe; and I don't think they'll bring her to the gallows but just make it out madness—which it is, and worse. Poor misfortunate soul, who could ever thought that she would do the like?"

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

RHODA'S predictions were realized. When the news of Esthers' death was imparted to Hannah, she acknowledged her guilt, with no sign of repentance for the fact, and, strange to say, no sorrow for him. It was ambition and not love that had made her his ready instrument. Hannah believed in his heirship, and in the promise of marriage, which was no doubt equally false; for, in selecting her to do his wicked work, the Jew had manifestly calculated on an accomplice who could not betray him, and would be neither understood nor credited if she made the attempt. My sister's conjecture was right, too, as regarded the law proceedings. Our knowledge of the case, and all the influence we could command

being employed on Hannah's behalf, the plea of insanity was accepted by judge and jury, and she was kept in custody as a criminal lunatic.

I had no difficulty in proving my own innocence of Esthers' death, in proper form and according to Scotch law. When all was over, and all inquiries satisfactorily closed, I saw him laid down in Springfield churchyard, and the Joyces somehow contrived to prove themselves his heirs.

Before that business was done, the Scotch papers announced the death of Mr. Forbes, which took place at the "Barley Sheaf," one week after Helen's arrival, and the Falkirk doctors could not certify whether his disease was a slow fever or a rapid decline. Doctor Alexander Henderson, with whom his conferences had been long and private, doubtless knew it to have been a burdened conscience; but the sound sense and Christian prudence of the aged minister made him waive the subject of public confession and satisfaction on account of the living. He prayed by the dying bedside of his early communicant, said he believed him to be a sinner saved, as all sinners must be,

through free and sovereign grace ; and in great sorrow, tempered with pious resignation and eternal hope, his loving daughter closed Forbes' eyes, without ever suspecting the sin that had made them so sad and weary.

I had promised Forbes that none living should hear his crime from me, and I kept my promise according to common sense and without casuistry. Melrose Morton knew the whole story ; he had hastened northward in time to see his dying cousin, had talked with him alone, had heard of his confession to me, and in the privacy of our own home showed me a paragraph in *Saunders' News Letter* of the 31st of October. It briefly stated that some workmen, while clearing away the ruins of a house in Kildare-street, said to have been the town residence of the Earls of Galway, to make room for new stables behind the "Royal Hotel," had found a skeleton and a horse-pistol beside it, buried under the floor of one of the back rooms.

It went on to say that an inquest had been held the same afternoon, but no inquiry could cast any light on the strange discovery, except that it was the general opinion that murder must have been committed in that house, but

when or by whom, it was impossible to conjecture; the coroner summed up, the jury returned a verdict accordingly, and the mouldering relics of humanity were laid in St. Michael's churchyard. We both knew what that paragraph meant, and whose bones they were that the workmen had found under the floor. It was requisite for many reasons, and chiefly to remove the suspicions against Morton, which had crept into her mind, that Rhoda should know it too. On my sister's discretion and sound sense we could place implicit reliance; she was therefore made acquainted with the facts. They astonished far less than relieved her honest heart. She made her usual reflections, "that the works of Providence was wonderful, and who could have thought it; but it was a great mercy to know, anyhow."

Then Melrose and I took a quiet voyage to Dublin, found out the sexton of St. Michael's church, and induced him, for a suitable consideration, to assist us in privately, and under the shadow of night, removing the remains of my ill-fated and long-sought brother to a grave beside that of the father to whom his loss had been so terrible.

We did not leave Dublin till both names were engraven on the head-stone which Forbes had set up, and the grass had grown long about; and none but the well-paid sexton, and the equally rewarded stonecutter, knew that the thing had been done. When we returned to No. 9, it was agreed between us three that the entire tale should never be mentioned or referred to, if possible, in our after years; and the compact was faithfully kept by all.

So the banker's sin was buried with the dead, the sorrow of the Palivez line with the last of them; and time, which covers graves with grass and ruins with ivy, passed on and brought its changes to us as to all the living.

The Comenzoni, when they came into possession, made over to Helen Forbes and myself the money, plate, and jewels bequeathed to us by Madame Palivez. The golden reliquary was not among the latter. I made no inquiry on the subject, and therefore never knew into what hands it had fallen, or for what purpose the Greek house retained it; but all her servants, except old Marco and his wife, who went with her coffin to Kief, remained in their employment.

I did not refuse my share of the bequest, but Helen did, saying there must be some mistake; what could induce the Greek lady to leave money and jewels to her? I was equally unwilling to accept the half of her father's property which he had willed to me.

The very unusual dispute, as the lawyers called it, produced frequent meetings between us. Helen was desolate, and so was I. My sister would not marry Melrose Morton and leave me alone. It was a pity to keep them out of their own house and home. There was one woman that loved me; what if she were Forbes' daughter? Her hand and heart were unstained by the sin that lay so heavy on his.

All that Madame Palivez had spoken in her favour—ay, when she vexed my pride and folly by making me over to Helen—came up to memory. It was like obeying Madame's last wishes. Well it is that every woman does not know the motives which make men woo and wed; yet many have been worse than mine.

Suffice to say, I proposed to, and I married Helen Forbes on these various accounts. She accepted me willingly, yet with womanly dignity,

and every year of our married life taught me to value more, and profit by, her sterling qualities of head and heart. The natural result was a strong and sincere affection, founded on esteem, and therefore more apt to stand the wear of time and trial than the first romantic and unreasoning love. Under its influence, our early differences in faith and practice, which once seemed such insurmountable causes of division, gradually melted away. Helen's mind got emancipated from its Puritan prejudices without losing the sterling principles which gave it stability and strength. I, after such storm and shipwreck of my world within, learned from her fair example to cast anchor in the same safe haven.

The tranquil years of man have no history. We lived calmly and happily, confiding in each other, and easy in our circumstances. Not in Notting Hill House: the long sad years of her father's unexplained troubles made it dreary to Helen, and the memory of Forbes and my lost brother would have given me no rest in it. We left the mementoes of these things, and many more, behind us in London and its neighbourhood, went northward, and bought a pretty

country house in the pleasant borderland upon the banks of the Tweed, and not far from the old burgh of Melrose, where the Mortons made their settlement. There we lived in peace and contentment, had two sons, who grew up to be our consolation, and are now doing men's part in the world. But I am alone, for Helen was taken from me two years ago; and life has but one expectation now, namely, to follow her.

Melrose and my sister are old people like myself, with their four children married and settled in different Scotch towns; but we are often together, and sometimes talk over that long and weary past. It is more than forty years since all the romance and adventure of my life came to a close beside the purple-covered coffin that held the last of the Palivezi. I have grown a better and a wiser man since then, though the lessons that made me so have been slowly and quietly learned.

But now, in the evening of my days going peacefully down the hill-side which leads to the valley of the shadow, with hopes that look to the breaking of a brighter dawn beyond; and memory, the watcher, gazing far backward on

those luckless years not to be lost or softened in the distance of time, I write rather for the instruction than the entertainment of my readers this story of "A HIDDEN SIN."

THE END.

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